

Hayes, Tracy (2012) The accidental youth worker. In: Outdoor Learning as a means of promoting healthy and sustainable lifestyles and social inclusion for young people, 26-30 October 2012, Derwent Hill, Cumbria, UK.

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“Outdoor Learning as a means of promoting healthy and sustainable lifestyles and social inclusion for young people”.

**Conference Papers**

**EUROPEAN OUTDOOR LEARNING SEMINAR**  
**Derwent Hill, 26<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> October 2012**

Edited by

Barbara Humberstone

***EOE Network***

European Institute for Outdoor Adventure Education and Experiential Learning



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## **Foreword**

Derwent Hill was privileged to organise and host the European Outdoor Learning Seminar Hill from 26th to 30th October 2012. Derwent Hill Outdoor Education and Training Centre, in the English Lake District, is part of Sunderland City Council, and exists to provide life-enhancing opportunities for the young people of Sunderland. It celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2012.

The Seminar was funded by the EU Youth in Action Programme. Derwent Hill worked in partnership with the European Institute for Outdoor Adventure Education and Experiential Learning and the following partner organisations:

- Adventure and Environmental Awareness Group (UK)
- BSJ Marburg (Germany)
- Center Šolskih in Obšolskih Dejavnosti (Slovenia)
- Grandeur Nature (France)
- Institute for Outdoor Learning (UK)
- Oslo og Omland Friluftsråd (Norway)
- Szkoła Aktywnego Wypoczynku Frajda (Poland).

The Seminar followed the Youth In Action theme "Education through Sport and Outdoor Activities", with a specific focus on "Outdoor Learning as a means of promoting healthy and sustainable lifestyles and social inclusion for young people".

The Seminar brought together experts and practitioners to share theoretical knowledge and experience, and to discuss and exchange good practice, in order to develop new and more effective ways of working with young people in the outdoors to promote healthy and sustainable lifestyles and social inclusion. It established and developed new working relationships between promoters and participants with a view to developing future projects through Youth in Action and other relevant programmes.

The Seminar also contributed to the 2012 'European Year of Active Ageing', which looked to "build a healthy and active population for the future" by recognising that "the importance of health and being healthy must be promoted throughout the lifecourse, starting with investment in early years and continuing right through into old age".

There were 74 participants from around Europe, including Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

The different nationality groups brought with them a wide variety of expertise to the workshops and practical sessions, and shared innovative ways of tackling issues. This will add real value to what is currently being delivered for young people.

The Seminar was informal and experiential. In addition to keynote lectures and plenary sessions, the programme included 46 sessions of lectures, workshops, practical activities in

the outdoors, and study visits, organised in five broad parallel strands. This provided remarkably rich and varied opportunities for sharing and learning. The strands were:

- Inclusion: Youth Work and Inclusion
- Wellbeing: Health and Sustainability
- Schools: Outdoor Learning in the School context
- Professional: Methods, Pedagogy, and Professional issues
- Local: The local Lake District environment and outdoor learning provision

The Seminar was stimulating and rewarding, and the participants left energised to take new ways of working back home.

## Keynote

### **Adventure Education, Erlebnispädagogik and Youthwork in Germany from 1945 until Today – an Inclusive Journey**

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Colleagues,

This speech deals with adventure education and Erlebnispädagogik and the way it is embedded in youth work in Germany. I would like to express my sincere thanks for having been given the opportunity to present to you some selected aspects of this involvement as it has developed since the end of the war in 1945 until today. At the same time I will also examine questions as to the social policies that form its framework and the development of the socio-scientific and educational theories relating to it.

In the background you can see the outline of my talk: I will begin with a short historical overview, followed by the second point, where I will expand on the question of what the social causes and backgrounds are of the enormous increase in significance that approaches of adventure education and Erlebnispädagogik have experienced in the last almost thirty years. Third, I will present a fragmentary sketch of how adventure and Erlebnispädagogik are embedded in academic theory. In the fourth point I will allude to practical and professional challenges, before ending my talk with a short conclusion.

#### **1. First, the historical developments:**

Against the background of the still fresh experiences of German National Socialism, where the focus on body and nature in educational and philosophical approaches was instrumentalized and aestheticized for the purposes of a totalitarian state, it was difficult after 1945 for erlebnis-pedagogical ideas to gain a foothold again. Therefore, in the first few decades of post-war Germany, it was more or less only the maritime and alpine Outward Bound schools, which were based on Kurt Hahn's short-term-school idea and which were founded in 1952 in Weißenhaus, in 1956 in Baad and in 1968 in Berchtesgaden, that represented a morally acceptable educational concept which gradually became associated with Erlebnispädagogik, although Kurt Hahn himself had always talked about Erlebnistherapie (Erlebnis therapy). It was only at the beginning of the 1980s that professional youth care increasingly turned its focus on Erlebnispädagogik. For quite a while at first the term Erlebnispädagogik was connected with sailing projects intended as interventional education (in a sense of residential care), whose focus was on re-socializing young people who were behaviourally deviant, were consuming drugs or had committed criminal offences. But also in youth work, which does not primarily have to react to problems of socialization and upbringing, but generally focused on the support of children and young people, change seemed to be called for. This change was finally marked in 1985 by a publication with the illustrative title of *Erleben statt Reden* that can be translated by

*“experiencing rather than talking”* (Fischer et al. 1985). Since then Erlebnispädagogik in Germany has continually been gaining popularity and attraction, a trend that seems to be unstoppable, so that a notable handbook for social work in 2001 (Sommerfeld, p. 399) not only confirms the success story of Erlebnispädagogik but also calls it the appropriate pedagogical answer to the educational problems of our modern times. And this development has remained remarkably dynamic in the new millennium, as even a superficial glance at the practice of children and youth services, in which Erlebnispädagogik is playing an increasingly relevant role, shows. In Germany today, in publicly funded professional youth work, erlebnis-pedagogical approaches are extensively implemented to address problems in the areas of youth violence, drug abuse, career choice, truancy, health, integration of young people with an immigration background or are used as a generally preventative measure. This kind of youth work finds its users in youth centres mostly in towns, on adventure play grounds, youth meeting points in rural areas or also through outreaching, detached youth work, such as street work, as well as through the increasing cooperation between youth work institutions and schools. This means the main users are primarily young males and females who could summarily be called 'Youth at Risk': children and young people with an immigration background and from socially disadvantaged conditions, that is young people who almost all have to cope with a difficult educational history.

What the social workers who use erlebnis-pedagogical approaches actually do in their everyday practice is mostly based on a broadly defined idea of education - which is rarely explicit or elaborated on but rather vague. They distance themselves from the rather narrow, formal understanding of education, which relies solely on the acquisition of factual knowledge and on cognitive skills or is governed by considerations of usefulness and economic exploitation. (see Thiersch 2003, p. 436; see Becker 2009, p. 5 f.). The goals and work concepts developed from this perspective primarily focus on the development of the personality and social competence of children and young people. Among other things, individuals are to learn to understand and overcome their own limits, to experience their own physical competence and capability to take action, to experience togetherness with others and rely on each other in a group in confrontation with real or arranged natural situations. This usually includes the outdoor practices of climbing, hiking, sailing, canoeing, spending the night outdoors and making campfires, even though, for some years now, urban adventurous situations and activities like City-Bound, parcours etc., which provide a challenge profile comparable to that of natural settings, as well as activities on high and low level ropes courses, have been added to the range, a trend which is growing. Especially the latter have achieved an enormous increase in importance in the past years. Reliable estimates assume that there are about 500 ropes courses in Germany, which are run partly for educational purposes and partly as commercial climbing parks.

## **2. Social modernization processes and Erlebnispädagogik/Adventure Education**

I will now turn to my second point. What is the context this whole process of development is embedded in and how is it interpreted? Well: many publications that are attributed to Erlebnispädagogik itself establish connections to its historical roots, connections to the partly morally charged critical views of contemporary educational issues of the time before 1933, saying that Erlebnispädagogik could now continue from that point smoothly and without

ideological scruples. Reference is made, for example, to the “Kulturkritik”, the critique of contemporary civilization and to the “Lebensphilosophie”, the life philosophy of the late 19th and early 20th century, which saw itself as critical alternative to natural sciences and to the one-sided emphasis only on the rational way to gain understanding of the world. There is also reference to the German and international Reformpädagogik, the progressive education movement, to the Outward Bound Schools as well as to the youth movement and scouting association (see Heckmair/Michel 2002; see, in connection with the partly also problematic roots, Becker et al. 2007 and Oelkers 2011). Still today, the majority of publications on Erlebnispädagogik in Germany falls back - often full of emotions - on the traditional line of argumentation of Kurt Hahn and his ideologically based defence education (see Schwier 1998, p. 118). Hahn – as the educational theorist von Hentig said – believed that the identified evils and symptoms of decline could not be remedied with society, but only against it (see von Hentig 1966). What makes Erlebnispädagogik so successful and unrivalled - also and especially at the beginning of the 21st century - is, that Erlebnispädagogik, as the proponents say, is an appropriate instrument to compensate for the contemporary ills of society, for the pressure to perform and to consume, for the dangers of the modern media, the estrangement of people from nature and the lack of social devotion and concern and thus to help healing powers to unfold.

Some external observers of Erlebnispädagogik, on the other hand, put its success from about the middle of the 1990s into the context of the discussions in social science that were conducted at that time about the so-called thrill-seeking or “Erlebnis” driven society and the quickly changing consumer and adventure markets connected with it (see Schulze 1992). These critics denounce Erlebnispädagogik as a pedagogical phenomenon just representing the spirit of the times that will disappear as quickly from the stage as it has emerged.

However, neither the sociological perspective of the critics, nor the proponents' recourse to the rich history of philosophical ideas which, at the same time, is hostile to any form of modernization, can do justice to the success story of Erlebnispädagogik in Germany in the past decades. As long as the two sides of the argument remain isolated, they ignore - as Peter Becker has outlined again and again - the real social developments and increasing rationalization processes, which in itself again leads to a counter reaction, so that in the end attention is turned back to the bodily and sensory dimensions of our basic anthropological condition (see Becker et al. 2007, p. 9 ff.). This is due to the extent to which the body and its senses are subjected to discipline in our modern society, which by necessity means that the needs of other dimensions of the personality in central areas of life, such as school and working life, are neglected. Physical and sensory components are becoming increasingly irrelevant in the modern age, the lifestyle of which, however, exacts a high psycho-social price from individuals of all ages and thus also from children and young people. In fact, the physical side often reasserts itself in the life of a society, so to speak, by the back door: in the form of aggressive, stressed, addicted, ill and overweight bodies. Paradoxically, the neglect of the body, on the one hand, is confronted by an enormous increase in postmodern physical activities, on the other hand, especially among children and young people. In the past decades the body and its youthful and vigorous presentation has more and more developed into a kind of leading social currency for social positioning, into relevant capital and a social medium of exchange (see Zinnecker 1989, p. 155). Adolescents play with attractive adventurous and



expressive body styles and posturing. Therefore, putting emphasis on physical activities, on the one hand, serves to counteract unhealthy developments. On the other hand, physical activities are also components of the everyday life of children and young people and become incorporated cultural capital according to Bourdieu.

Both dimensions, the dimension of compensation and the dimension of everyday life practice point to the fact that the increase in importance of Erlebnispädagogik cannot be dismissed just as a fashion fad, but that it must be placed into a larger context, because there is no doubt that it represents educational attempts to 'revive' the body, its sensuousness and holistic nature. Therefore, the discussions about Erlebnispädagogik must be embedded in a more global reflexion about a body-related practice with children and young people.

In that way, we would also have an outline of the professional scope of youth work that would differ from the kind of prevention pedagogics that is purely directed at tackling deficiencies. The core concern would then be how youth work might be able to counteract the degeneration of physical and sensory potentials, on the one hand, and the indiscriminate pluralization and commercialization of the sports and exercise markets, on the other hand, and contribute to teaching "children and young people the kind of physical and practical confidence in their lives that is open to the future, which is directed against the estrangement from their own bodies" (Becker 2000, p. 474). The core concern would then be how in that way the development of autonomy of young people can be strengthened. So now I will turn to my third point, to the question of how the phenomenon of Erlebnispädagogik is treated in recent theories of social work or generally in pedagogy.

### **3. Adventure and Erlebnispädagogik in recent theories of social work or pedagogy**

Although the problems resulting from the seeming paradox between the neglect of the physical nature of people, on the one hand, and the revaluation of the body, on the other hand, are more than obvious, the theories of social work and pedagogy has largely ignored the question of the importance of body, exercise and sensory experience until today. For a large part of the academic world, Erlebnispädagogik has remained a rather muddy field, suitable at best to get young people who display social behavioural problems or who have offended against the law off the street and to keep them out of the mischief they would make if they were unsupervised. Nonetheless, by now a number of serious theoretical works have been presented that attempt to fathom out what yields Erlebnispädagogik might bring for social work and education and to relate central considerations and paradigms to each other. What is interesting in this context is that the actual terms of adventure and adventure education also begin to come into play as from about 1990. Hans Thiersch (1993; 2004), the probably most notable German social pedagogue at present, with reference to life philosopher Georg Simmel, talked about adventure as life pattern. He says it is fitting to the age of youth and pointed out how important adventure is to reach young people on the outside of society, which other educational approaches failed to do, and he placed adventure as a functional equivalent to juvenile risk-taking in the concept of social work oriented on living conditions, a concept that he conceived for the main part himself. The well-known social psychologist Heiner Keupp connects the physical and sensual dimensions of adventure education and Erlebnispädagogik and their promise of authenticity with the question of how people today -

in the face of dramatically increased demands on them - can succeed in establishing their identity and how especially young people can develop those mental, physical, social and material resources they need to develop the capacity to act on their own account and to grow up. In order to build up "life coherence" children and young people need free spaces in their lives to "be able to design themselves and to have a designing influence on their everyday life" (Keupp 2004, p. 43). In the 13th German Children and Youth Welfare Report of 2009, whose core focus is on issues of health promotion and prevention of health problems, Keupp has further elaborated this approach, which goes back to the theory of salutogenesis of Aaron Antonovskys. The central theoretical concepts of the sense of coherence and resilience offer a number of possible connections to the practice of adventure education and Erlebnispädagogik in youth work.

Another line of discussion in the field of German social pedagogy refers to the way children and young people occupy social spaces and how this process affords them the necessary experience of their own self-efficacy for their individual development process. In the recent past, it was especially Ulrich Deinet, who has drawn attention to the many interactive cross-references between this discussion of possession taking and social spaces in youth work and the field of adventure education and Erlebnispädagogik. Seen from this perspective of the possession-taking behaviour of children and young people, he considers adventure and experiential learning of particular interest because it forms the bridge between spaces that are created for educational purposes and the general need for possession and risk-taking of young people. They offer specific educational opportunities which start out from the living conditions of children "... physical activity projects focused on venture and risk offer purposely chosen spaces that provide the opportunity for experiences that are hardly accessible in this form in other areas of life. In this respect Erlebnispädagogik is developing a special curriculum of informal education". (Deinet 2007, p. 226)

The educational potential for children and young people is also the point that Peter Becker takes up in his work on educational theory and cultural philosophy, which explicitly distances itself from the theoretical categories of the term of Erlebnis and which, at present, offers the only consistent theoretical outline of adventure education in Germany. On the basis of the reflections of developmental psychology he has been working out his model of adventure as a cultural pattern, as a pressure-free, playful and social practice of dealing with curiosity, thirst for knowledge and learning through experience. According to this model, individuals experience their capacity for autonomous action in the confrontation with critical situations of adventure in which the action routines they had learned before are not sufficient any more. Thus they promote their own individual development process. What gives this approach particular significance in youth work is that it discusses the relevant developmental tasks of childhood and youth as well as the experiences necessarily have to be made by children and young people to become individually independent and autonomous and, furthermore, it also establishes the connection of this with the dimensions of challenges posed by adventurous activities. "While during adolescence it is the situation of separation and the challenges this poses that make adventurous situations a relevant issue in this phase, during childhood, because of the children's so evident urge to seek out new situations and confront the surprises they may have in store for them, adventure becomes a playful way of dealing with the world that is as yet unfamiliar to them"(Becker 2004, p. 9; see Becker 2006 and 2009). Peter Becker

gives a detailed outline of the structural meaning of the experiences to be had in adventurous activities, such as riding on untamed streams and rivers, confronting wind and high waves on the sea or tackling difficult climbing passages (see 1998), in order to draw attention to the analogies between this kind of playful but also serious rehearsal and the structural meaning of experiences and the developmental challenges in adolescence, where individuals have to learn to make their own decisions and take full responsibility for them. The following list is a summary of Becker's overview of 1998:

- 1) Adventures demand that individuals confront strange and unfamiliar situations, confront inner and outer obstacles. When they step over the border that marks the area of life they are familiar with, they can see this life from a distance and can reflect upon it, new impressions can be integrated.
- 2) Since no two adventurous situations are the same, structural solutions have to be found that have not yet become routine actions. Where individuals have no recourse to existing routines, they must make decisions; they have to weigh alternatives, analyze risk and be able to transfer what they have learned from one context to another.
- 3) Normally, adventurous situations are confronted in a group. This raises the issues of responsibility and trust and demands verbal communication, the willingness to enter into discussion and the ability to cope with conflict.
- 4) Adventurous situations create the urge to talk about them, which gives scope for reflection about what happened and for consolidating experiences through discussion. This creates opportunities for the individuals to use the situations they have gone through as a mirror for their personal history so far and to formulate their expectations of their future.

These structural analogies describe the core argument of Peter Becker's model. At the same time he points out - analogously to the living conditions focus of, for example, Thiersch - that adventure activities as such are very attractive to young people generally and especially to disadvantaged young people, whose life style and leisure time needs are often focused on action and risk. To start with, the power of adventure can be used in youth work to satisfy young people's quest for the thrill of action and suspense. But it is necessary to go beyond this compensatory function, to realize the above-mentioned potentials of experience and learning in these activities. Becker feels that this can be implemented more easily in the institutional framework of youth work rather than at school, since youth work is not restricted to curricula and is by nature voluntary and based on participation and inclusion, rather than on selection and exclusion. Youth work treats adolescents as whole persons and does not demand they play a role; it allows for experimentation, alternatives, takes the time pressure out of the development through experience and considers urban as well as natural spaces as educational opportunities. Thus youth work "offers a way ... especially when it tries to understand and justify its work in the sense of comprehensive education." (Becker 2010, p. 11)

Enough of the outline of the theoretical approach to adventure education of Peter Becker, an approach that in a way offers a paradigm change in the discussions of adventure education

and Erlebnispädagogik in Germany, even if the great majority of actors in this scene in Germany continues to be stuck in the dead ends and fuzziness that the term "Erlebnis" can lead to. At this point I would like to end my short tour through the development of theories, in order to turn to my fourth point, to some of the challenges and perspectives of the practice of adventure education and Erlebnispädagogik in youth work in Germany, which I will briefly outline by presenting some of the key references.

#### 4. Challenges and perspectives

Clearly, the question of what constitutes **professionalism** in adventure education and Erlebnispädagogik is of particular importance. Activities offered in the area of adventure education and Erlebnispädagogik *can* gain great significance and *can* have many positive effects on the social and personal development of all children and young people - as much so in the case of the so-called normal ones as in the case of children and young people who are disadvantaged, considered difficult, violent, may turn to drug abuse, etc. Confrontation with nature, competently dealing with obstacles and crises, experiencing their own capability to take action and their limitations, coping with difficulties in the group as well as negotiating solutions: all this may - if the setting is suitable - give children and young people the experience of being individuals capable of taking action and of having the power to achieve something. This is why the qualification and professionalism of the educators in charge are of particular importance in the development, planning and performance of the activities. These educators do not only need to have the necessary hard skills in guiding and carrying out the activities, they must also be able to carry out an "interpretation of the specific case problem" (Müller/Becker-Lenz 2008, p. 32) on the basis of their theoretical and practical knowledge and understanding of the context. The professionals must be able to assess and justify in each specific case in view of the group as the whole and with an eye on each individual boy or girl why they are arranging a particular adventure activity and what educational potentials may be derived from them.

For the planning of adventurous activities, the selection of methods, the educational concept of action and its performance, but also for the reflection phases that may follow adventurous situations, it is absolutely essential that the professionals have the competence to apply themselves to the individual problems of the adolescents and to interpret them in each case. If a connection is to be established to the individual's real life, to his or her subjectivity and if the individual is to be enabled to transfer learning achievements to his or her own development process, social workers who seek out adventurous natural spaces with children and young people, cannot, in contrast to the term usually used in practice, be trainers who just work through standardized programmes, as it is, unfortunately, often done, for example, in connection with the activities in ropes courses (about guidelines of good practice and about requirement specifications of educators in guiding and supervising adventure educational projects, bsj Marburg 2005, p. 80 ff.).

Considering **gender-specific perspectives**, this is my next key word, which seems to follow case-specific considerations quite naturally as this by necessity also means that adventure and experiential learning projects always have to take the different life situations, needs and prerequisites of boys and girls into account. Already quite early on in their lives, they can

develop very different attitudes towards adventure and practices that involve daring. It is, for example, possible to recognize gender-specific differences in the risk-taking behaviour in the informal play of boys and girls on adventure and other playgrounds. Girls and boys are often either restrained or encouraged, they take up different spaces, they develop different physical styles in order to demonstrate that they are a "real girl" or a "real boy". As they grow older, these differences can have far-reaching consequences for their individual self-image. Girls, who tend not to test their bodies in risky or daredevil experiments, will approach new situations carefully and hesitantly or even avoid them altogether. With boys, however, who show a greater willingness to take risks, masculine daring can also lead to ambiguous consequences, for example, when they take incalculable risks (see Rose 2000, p. 38). Therefore, when planning and designing adventurous arrangements the point of view and perspectives have to be adjusted in a way that takes account of all aspects of the individual, including gender-specific facets. Masculine or feminine behaviour can thus be reconstructed in an appropriate way against the setting of the individual educational situation. To arrange stimulating adventurous educational situations therefore also means, to promote a balance of, on the one hand, patience, caution and reflection and, on the other hand, courage, self-confidence and the willingness to take risks, appropriate to situation and personality, in order to counteract narrow and restraining gender-stereotypical patterns. This kind of gender-related perspective of adventure education and Erlebnispädagogik opens up a wealth of concrete connections for the integration of adventurous activities both in the co-educational practice and in the single-sex practice of work with girls and boys.

Equally rich is the range of the developments that are possible in adventure education that works on the principles of **inclusion** of disabled and non-disabled children and young people. So far there are only few reports of this practice in Germany. The ones there are, however, are encouraging (see [www.zerum-ueckermuende.de](http://www.zerum-ueckermuende.de); [www.muehlenkraft.de](http://www.muehlenkraft.de); [www.e-l-e.de](http://www.e-l-e.de); Leven/Reinert 2000; Michl/Riehl 1996). They demonstrate how outdoor activities that include disabled boys and girls can foster their autonomy and help them extend their personal boundaries; they also demonstrate the educational opportunities there are for non-disabled participants in joint activities. The developmental perspectives in this field, which received a considerable boost by the signing of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006, has not yet been fully explored. There are still enormous potentials that adventure education offers for the inclusion practice in youth work that remain largely unexploited. This is true to the same degree for the field of **pre-school education**, which at present is in a state of major change in Germany and for which enormously increased educational demands are being formulated. Practical experiences so far show that confrontation with natural phenomena, an out of doors practice, offers excellent opportunities to provide children with stimulating experiential spaces for them to make observations in their own time, unpressured, to develop questions and to follow their curiosity. Even though there are about 1,000 forest kindergardens, a rewarding field of action for adventure education and Erlebnispädagogik is showing itself in the face of about 50,000 pre-school institutions and about 500,000 trained employees in the field of early learning. For comparison: Youth work, with about 50,000 employees, does not even employ 10% of this dimension (2010: 673,000 teachers).

## 5. Conclusion

I will now turn to my concluding remarks. Despite the fact that it has been able to establish itself in the field of youth work in the past decades, the practice of adventure education and Erlebnispädagogik is confronted with continuously changing challenges and is thus called upon to further sharpen its profile, to discuss questions of educational theory and to compare its approaches with the discussions in social work and pedagogy in general. The majority of the actors in the Erlebnispädagogik scene in Germany, however, take a different view here at present. Often priority is given to publication activities based on little sophisticated positivistic input-output studies or fascinated reports about outdoor experiences in order to give empirical proof of and to legitimize the "so beneficial" practice of Erlebnispädagogik. What can be observed is that professional umbrella organisations make great efforts to define standards for certificates and to standardize measures, rather than seriously wrestling to establish a sound theoretical basis. "One gram of experience is better than a ton of theory, simply because every theory becomes vivid and can be proven only through experience". This is how one of the leading German organisations advertises its further education courses in Erlebnispädagogik for social workers. "The largest classroom of the world" is the motto, which at the very least shows a very naive understanding of the relationship between formal and informal education, which adorns the web page of another prominent German outdoor association. One might dismiss these statements as rather offhand kind of advertising slogans, if it was not necessary at the moment to decide where to put the main emphasis in the question of the relationship between theory and practice and thus also decide on the general future direction of adventure education and Erlebnispädagogik. But it seems that the market is more and more penetrating the field. According to the renowned pedagogue Michael Winkler (1995 and 2007) Erlebnispädagogik might be poised to become the definitive model of education of the modern age. At the same time, though, there is the risk in modern society that the act of crossing borders, which is used for educational purposes, may become an end in itself and that consequently Erlebnispädagogik falls victim to the dynamism which the principle of border crossing has developed in society. Will adventure education and Erlebnispädagogik in fact degenerate to becoming a component in the resplendent and estranging consumer markets as part of a publicly subsidized education for sale, "off the shelf" as coined by Chris Loynes ? Is the selective short term thrill all that children and young people are granted to experience in adventurous activities as a compensatory reaction to the world they live in, in which they will continue to be robbed of sensory and physical experiences? Or will adventure education and Erlebnispädagogik actually succeed in distinguishing itself as modern form of education, not as a romantic alternative to the school, but as a *pari passu* approach to the world which focuses on the person in a holistic sense.

If so, opportunities for adventures must not be restricted to educational projects outside the everyday lives of children and young people, but must remain a part of it, must be accessible in the world they live in. This would also include the many informal places for activity and adventure that allow little adventures that are unchecked by adults. Streets, yards, parks, meadows and forests in the neighbourhood of residential areas are largely uncolonized spaces that are not subject to educational purposes and are thus important places in the world of children and young people. Here is room for elementary experiences. Therefore it should also be the concern of adventure education and Erlebnispädagogik that its professionals get involved and use their influence to keep these spaces open. After all, in all our conceptional deliberations, in the necessary formulations of objectives and in the analysis of the potentials

of adventure education and Erlebnispädagogik in educational processes, we should not forget that adventurous experiences have a value in themselves, outside any educational purposes, that they represent a basic anthropological approach. We will probably all agree that through adventure educational actions in youth work we can develop educational perspectives and achieve educational success. However, we must not overlook the risks - which exist in all cases of colonizing worlds people live in - that go with turning adventure into an instrument and educational tool and that may possibly block further opportunities of education and gaining experience. In that case adventure may be in danger of losing its adventurous quality together with its fascination.

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## **Developing Open Spaces: Using a Community Development Approach**

*“When the best leader’s work is done the people say,*

*‘We did it ourselves.’ ”*

(Lao Tzu)

The role of the outdoor educator is multifaceted. As a freelance consultant and researcher, with experience in play and youth work as well as community development, I was asked to take on a short term and part-time piece of work, acting as a catalyst to ‘jump start’ local involvement and action. I was to work with residents, and in particular young people and children, on an estate of social housing. The estate is situated on the outskirts of one of England’s South Coast holiday resorts. In the middle of the housing was a large barren and under-used open space, the equivalent of approximately five football pitches. Scattered around the estate were other smaller areas, some grassed and some tarmacked. Across a main road was a wild area, with some boardwalks across marshy land. This had become the domain of the dog-walking fraternity.

The long-term purposes of the project were to support the community in becoming more sustainable. The estate would become a better place to live. There would be a reduction in youth crime. There would be a sense of pride and belonging. This would be achieved partly by:

- encouraging a greater involvement in the outdoor environment;
- encouraging young people to use their local outdoor spaces and eventually the wild area; and
- encouraging young people to develop a sense of pride, belonging and ownership of their local open spaces, by developing these spaces aesthetically and in terms of the variety of possible options for activities.

The intention was that I would work with the children and young people, to draw up plans:

- to make a barren tract of land in the middle of the housing estate more attractive and accessible;
- to encourage the development of a ‘corridor’ linking this open space with the wild area; and
- to promote greater use of the wild area by local people, and in particular children and young people.

These plans were to be used in submissions to various funding bodies, including the National Lottery.

## Background

Nationally, there is a concern about issues related to exercise and the health of children and young people. There are also concerns about maintaining and increasing an understanding of environmental issues. Related to these are considerations about accessing the outdoors for leisure, relaxation, environmental, physical and other activities, by some under-represented sectors of the population, such as people with disabilities, people from minority ethnic groups and poorer people.

The UNICEF report on well-being ranked United Kingdom (UK) children at the bottom of the world's 21 richest countries (UN, 2007). Nairn and IPSOS MORI conducted follow-up research. They used subjective indicators and found that fundamental to well-being was time spent doing things with friends and family. However, children in the UK had fewer opportunities for fun outdoor activities, than those in Spain and Sweden. In addition, girls tended to play nearer home than boys. This indicated that there was a need to develop opportunities for outdoor activities close to children's homes, as well as further afield. They highlighted the need to protect open spaces from development (Nairn and IPSOS MORI, 2011). Currently, playing fields in parts of the UK are under threat. There is a pressure on local authorities to infill spaces between houses, as the demand for housing continues to increase.

A brief overview of some of research highlights the values of children and young people accessing their local public open spaces. Valentine (2004) and Irwin et al (2007) endorse the need to protect public open spaces close to housing. They argue that these spaces are vital for young people to escape adult supervision and define their identities. This is integral to developing a sense of social well-being and a sense of self. Worpole and Knox (2007) identify that access to open spaces is important for developing ties to communities and a sense of belonging and sense of place. Pretty et al (2009) maintain that a continuing enjoyment of nature is linked to being able to access natural environments. Beunderman (2010) writes that by engaging with others in the local environment, children and young people develop life skills and a more positive view of their neighbourhood.

However, even where open spaces are adjacent to housing, research suggests that these spaces tend to be underused. Research conducted in England during the 2007 Playday found that only 21% of children and young people play out daily. This can be compared with 71% of the adults surveyed, who said that they, as children, had played out every day (Playday Research, 2007). Worryingly, 22% of adults surveyed by Living Streets (2009) thought that children should not be allowed out unsupervised until they were 16. The threat of violence, a fear of abduction, and the linking of groups of young people with anti-social behaviour were given as reasons for this reluctance to engage in outdoor play (Crawford, 2009; Playday, 2007). Some adults also valued structured outdoor activities more highly than free, spontaneous, self-initiated, 'loose parts' activities (Hofferth and Sandberg, 2000; Nicholson, 1971). Research conducted with 1000 parents during this year's Playday, revealed that traffic and a fear of strangers were the two main barriers to children playing outside. 49% of parents identified fear of strangers as a barrier, 46% said traffic and 31% highlighted fear of accident and injury (Playday 2012). How will children and young people develop the knowledge and skills to manage risks (DCSF, 2007)?

Gill (2007:14) argues that these beliefs are the side effects of social and cultural change. Society has become risk averse. In addition, there has been a growth in road traffic. People have car-dependent life styles. Parents have longer working hours. There has been a decline in the quantity and quality of public open spaces. Children and young people's lives have become media rich. The availability of indoor leisure activities has grown and competes with many opportunities offered outdoors. These factors have reinforced 'the logic of containment' (ibid). Thus, nationally and locally, there is a need to change attitudes so that children and young people can have the freedom to enjoy their local outdoor spaces. This project sought to find ways of counteracting these beliefs and attitudes.

### **Community Development and Youth Work Models**

Two models, drawn from community development and youth work practice in the UK underpinned my work. After wide experience and consultation in the field, Barr and Hashagen (2000) developed a model that highlighted key elements in the development of effective communities. They define the overarching intention of community development as the support of a healthy community, which is 'liveable', sustainable and equitable. The community has quality of life. This is dependent on the community being caring, safe, creative, sharing its wealth and being owned by its citizens. Community members develop these aspects of quality of life through personal empowerment (working with individuals), taking positive action (working with people to define issues), taking responsibility for organizing (supporting and developing community organisations) and participating and being involved (linking community organisations with others, making decisions and planning).

My work was very much at this foundation level. I worked with individuals in the community, so that they might have the skills, knowledge and confidence to develop and implement ideas. The individuals I worked with included residents, young people, children, community leaders, youth workers, managers on a local industrial estate, the police, housing officers, leisure services officers and many others. Initially this was to hear about their issues. As the project developed it focused more on dispelling some of the myths about young people and children and exploring the possibilities for change. I found that some of the adults had to be prompted to remember what they had enjoyed about engaging with the outdoors when they were younger, so that they could recognize the experiences that the children and young people were missing. I worked with organisations, affirming their skills to contribute to the overall project and offering informal learning opportunities so that some gaps in knowledge and skills might be filled. A key principle was ensuring that important decisions would be made by community members, the children, young people and residents, rather than by professionals on behalf of the people they represented. This was to be critical if the initiative was to continue after my withdrawal.

My work with the children and young people was guided by Hart's (1992) ladder of participation. Hart's ladder has eight rungs. He states that the three lowest rungs on the ladder are 'non-participation'. These are rungs one to three. These are where young people are manipulated to say or do certain things, where they are merely visible as decoration, or where they are tokenized. Rungs four and five are where young people are assigned and informed or consulted and informed. At rungs six and seven, the young people begin to have more power.

Rung six is where action is adult initiated and young people make the decisions. At rung seven young people lead and initiate action. Hart suggests the top rung of the ladder, rung eight, is the sharing of decision-making by young people and adults. Here, I suggest that there should be a rung nine. Ultimately, young people should make the decisions and inform the adults.

I endeavoured to work with children and young people initially at rungs four and five, coaching and delegating as they became more familiar with the possibilities available. I had to be sure that I was working on young people's agendas and with their ideas and that they were not the mouth-pieces of local adults. As the project progressed, we all became more confident and we understood the remit for the project, children and young people took more responsibility. My role was often to curb the enthusiasm of the adults, who were keen to have their voices heard. I also had to take into account the fact that young people are often transient within communities. Part of their maturation process may be to move on and away from the community. An over-reliance on a few key young people would not be conducive to the long-term development of opportunities and facilities in the area.

### **Using a Community Development Process**

Generally, when developing a project with children and young people, I work through a number of phases. I start with my familiarization I spend time getting to know the area, the people who live and work there, the facilities in the area, and the range of understandings of the issues in the area. Then I move on to an awareness raising and education phase, exploring and challenging the attitudes of local authority officers, professionals, key residents and children and young people. Next I work at a political phase, again challenging the ideas and power-bases of professionals, local authorities, community leaders and councilors, with the intention of identifying openings for action, 'windows of opportunity'. In the next phase, the youth work phase, I work more intensively with the children and young people to build skills in consultation, influencing, planning, organising and to develop their confidence. I also find ways to help them to 'look over the fence' at the possibilities, to 'dream for real' (Judy Ling Wong, 2002). Without this the children and young people would be limited by their current experiences, whether actual or seen through the media. I can then move into a consultation phase in which the children and young people are conducting interviews, distributing questionnaires, visiting other locations to gather and refine ideas, mapping, planning and making decisions. The final phase is writing the funding bid. This I do in conjunction with the children and young people, explaining what is required and supporting them in writing parts and collating these with illustrations and photographs. Here, I would hope to be working at Hart's eighth rung. However, because my time in the project was limited and there were prescribed dates for the submission of funding bids, I worked with the phases concurrently.

The key issues I faced were the scepticism of some adults, the strong views of other adults about what might be developed, and the limited experience of many of the children and young people. To generate ideas, the children and young people visited other places, armed with cameras, so that they could share their findings. They looked through catalogues of play and open space equipment. They looked on websites of organisations that have developed

open spaces, such as the Forestry Commission ([www.forestry.gov.uk](http://www.forestry.gov.uk)), Playlink (<http://www.playlink.org>), the Free Play Network ([www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/playlink/placesforplay/bs.htm](http://www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/playlink/placesforplay/bs.htm)), and Play England (<http://www.playengland.org.uk/resources/design-for-play.aspx>). Their ideas included more seating; a structure that could be used for climbing, sitting on and sheltering under; a row of rocks and boulders leading towards the wild area that could be sat on, scrambled on and climbed on; more planting; a performance area, for impromptu productions, and planned performances; more planting; fitness trails; a nature trail leading from the estate into the wild area; and camping and barbeque facilities in the wild area.

## **Outcomes**

Unfortunately, the funding bid in which I was involved, was unsuccessful. However, my intention was that once action had started I would withdraw from the project, confident that the project to develop the open spaces would continue and evolve, and that the children and young people, with the support of the residents, would have ownership of these developments. Since my involvement, funding has been found for play rangers to work on the estate, supporting children to develop their play ideas. There have been litter-picking sessions and abandoned cars have been removed. Children and young people have held tree and bulb planting sessions. An outdoor gym has been constructed. Relationships between residents and the local authority are reported to have improved. It is impossible to assess the extent to which I was a catalyst. The important thing is that the community is gradually moving towards being a healthy community, in which quality of life for community members, the residents, is central, and that at least some young people have a sense of pride in and belonging to their estate.

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## The Accidental Youth Worker

### Author's note

This is an informal, personal and reflective paper that contains my thoughts and feelings on being invited to participate in the European Outdoor Education Network Seminar, held near Keswick, in October 2012. It includes elements of an article submitted as partial requirements of my MA in Youth Work and Community Development. This, together with the research also conducted as part of the qualification, formed the basis for my workshop delivered at the seminar and provides the foundations for my doctoral research. I will begin by providing a summary of my background with an explanation of how I came to be at the conference. I will then reflect on my experiences and conclude with my future plans.

### About me

I consider myself to be a professional environmental youth worker within my wider role as an outdoor educator. However I admit I am an 'accidental youth worker', as this is not something I planned or intended to be. A youth work colleague, in deference to my environmental roots, prefers to call me a 'hoody-whisperer'. But how did I come to this point and how does environmental youth work differ from other forms of outdoor education? And what do I mean by outdoor education/learning? This is a contested term that has numerous (often conflicting) definitions and explanations and is a discussion that falls outside the scope of this paper. I feel it is sufficient to say, for the purpose of this article, that I am making use of the definition provided on the Institute for Outdoor Learning website (IOL, 2012)<sup>i</sup>:

*Outdoor learning is a broad term that includes: outdoor play in the early years, school grounds projects, environmental education, recreation and adventure activities, personal and social development programmes, expeditions, team building, leadership training, management development, education for sustainability, adventure therapy...and more. Outdoor learning does not have a clearly defined boundary but it does have a common core.*

I have chosen to share the account of my journey over the last few years, up to and including the conference, as I have come to realise through my research and through conversations that it is a journey I have shared, unknowingly, with many others. I have discovered that there are many accidental youth workers: people who, like me, did not set out to work with young people, but have ended up doing so through their love of being outside, and their desire to share this with other people, although not specifically young people. Working with young people, especially adolescents, is very different to working with older people or younger children, and requires a different approach, hence the development of youth work training. This is in marked contrast to other research (for example, by Gabrielle Horup, Louise Chawla and Joy Palmer) that shows environmental workers, conservationists and educators alike, tend to have a calling for this work from a very early age:



*It seems that very few people arrive in a conservation career by chance (only 2%) (Horup, 2010).*

It is probably also in contrast with some youth workers, who may decide at an early age that this is the career for them, although my experiences as a youth work training manager suggest this is less likely. The area of motivations and values, and their impact on practice, is something that I feel warrants further research. However, the purpose of this paper is to share my experiences for the benefit of others who may wake up one day and realise this has happened to them too: remember you are not alone!

For much of my adult life, outside of raising my family, the main focus of my work has been the natural environment. After graduating with a BSc in Natural Sciences, I wanted to educate and inspire others about the natural environment, to share my enthusiasm and sense of wonderment. I began working with young children, families and adults, then realised that young people were being inadvertently excluded by not offering opportunities that were accessible, relevant or attractive to them. I resolved to change this: partly because I was angry with others' comments/attitudes towards young people and wanted to address this, and partly because I discovered I really enjoyed youth work and wanted to learn more about it. I secured funding to deliver an 18 month long volunteering project for 13-19 year olds, called Teen Rangers<sup>ii</sup>. This was a successful project, which received a lot of attention from funding bodies, other environmental organisations and youth workers. However it brought me into conflict with some environmentalists, who were scathing of this type of work, considering it of less relevance than more traditional conservation work. I refer to this as a '*get off my land*' mentality. I have had anecdotal evidence from colleagues across England to suggest that my experience is not isolated one. However more research and evidence is required to confirm this. Thankfully my more recent research suggests this type of attitude is changing and, that the people who typically thought like this are dying out – at the risk of appearing a little flippant, perhaps not all extinction is bad? Or alternatively, they may have evolved into a more understanding, tolerant species of human, happy to share their outdoor spaces with the younger generation? Again, this is difficult to determine without more research.

One thing led to another, and before I could catch my breath, I was responsible for co-ordinating a major national youth volunteering project, delivered at a range of locations across England. During this time, I came to realise that, although I had extensive experience and knowledge of working with young people, I did not have the qualifications to match. I was also, at times, criticised by youth workers, who were quick to tell me that this was not really youth work, more a case of 'working with young people'. What's the difference? What did they mean? With the encouragement of my youth worker friends, I enrolled on a postgraduate course to gain my professional JNC<sup>iii</sup> qualification, and thus be recognised as a youth worker, as well as an environmentalist. This necessitated changing jobs to enable me to broaden my youth and community work experience, to include working with teenage parents and with adults on a health and wellbeing project. For me this was arguably the most challenging period of my life, as I had little contact with the natural world, and felt I had moved too far from my preferred habitat – too many concrete spaces, not enough grass or trees. I was an outdoor educator, trapped inside!

My MA Research: *An exploration into the value of using a youth work approach to environmental youth volunteering projects*, involved looking at the subject from a new angle. There has been substantial research into young people's experiences of environmental volunteering (for example v, 2007; Leyshon, 2008; O'Brien, Townsend and Ebdon, 2008), yet very little on the experience of organisations and project staff (included in O'Brien et al., 2008 and in Ockenden, 2008). The key themes I researched included:

- The lack of training opportunities for environmental youth workers; skills, knowledge and experience of staff appear to be more conservation than youth work focussed.
- Little understanding of the specificities of youth work, its challenges and how it differs from work with older volunteers.
- The rapid expansion of opportunities in response to additional funding: was this too much, too fast? This links to the apparent motivations behind development of environmental volunteering projects. Are they the result of internal/organisational pressure of staff members wanting to 'fill a gap' and expand the available opportunities or from the external pressure of funding availability and governmental policies?
- The values base of workers: are they passionate about conservation or young people or both?
- The disconnection between young people and the natural environment: how does this impact on the successful development of such projects? Particularly relevant when these projects are often targeted at the most disengaged/disaffected young people.

My research findings indicated that all of these factors do matter to the success of such projects. In contrast to older volunteers, many young people do not have a connection with nature. This increasing disconnection is of serious concern to environmentalists and educationalists, and there are theories such as nature deficit disorder (Louv 2005; Louv 2009), biophilia/biophobia (Wilson, 1984; White and Stoecklin 2008) that have been developed with the intention of highlighting and hopefully addressing this issue.

Traditionally, much work with young people outdoors has had a focus on outdoor education, experiences and adventures, usually involving activities such as canoeing, mountaineering and rock-climbing. This can be thought of as learning *through* the environment. Other areas focus on learning *about* the environment, involving nature study, biological surveying and recording. In contrast, environmental youth volunteering programmes offer the opportunity for learning *for* the environment, involving the how and why of caring for it (for example Ogilvie, 2005; Ogilvie, 2012). However, for conservation activities to be really effective in terms of the individual's experience there needs to be a strong foundation of understanding and affection for the natural environment. In a speech in 1968, Baba Dioum stated that,

*In the end we will conserve only what we love. We love only what we understand. We will understand only what we are taught.*

The inclusion of education within this quote is particularly astute. How can we expect young people, who may have very limited knowledge or first-hand experience of the natural environment, to feel enthusiastic about being asked to care for it, or even want to be outside in it? This is where the need for professional, experienced, preferably qualified workers is most apparent, and is where outdoor education, in all its forms (from risky adventures to gentle explorations) can help by providing those experiences.

The values and principles demonstrated by staff members who develop and deliver projects and outdoor educational experiences are fundamental to their success. The ideal is for a combination of environmental awareness and an understanding of youth-work. Where this cannot be found in one person, there needs to be collaboration, support and partnership working. In the words of one of my former colleagues:

*It isn't about getting young people to respect the natural environment, it's about inspiring them which requires doing something meaningful, of value to the environment and the young person, having conversations, doing this well and doing it again if needed, encouraging, motivating, saying thank you and reflecting on what's been achieved* (Research participant<sup>iv</sup> personal communication, 2010).

To me, this is the essence of environmental youth work: inspiration and meaning come first, then respect should naturally follow. However this takes skill and ability to do effectively, and I would also argue, it takes time and space. As outdoor educators we need to allow sufficient space and time for people to *be* in nature, not just to *do* things in or to nature (whether that is adventurous activities or practical conservation) – in a way that is meaningful and relevant for them and enables them to reflect on their experiences and to make sense of them.

### **What next?**

Thankfully, I successfully achieved my MA and can justifiably call myself a qualified environmental youth worker since I am doubly skilled and experienced. I found the process of qualifying as a professional youth worker challenging and interesting, and in the process changed jobs for a second time, to work for a youth work charity as their Training Manager. In this role I was responsible for training and supporting other people as youth and community workers. This is something I found very rewarding. Has it changed my practice with young people? Yes, it has. I have become a much more reflective person, keen to think about what I do, how I do it and why:

*...reflective learning is the process of internally examining and exploring an issue of concern, triggered by an experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self, and which results in a changed conceptual perspective...* (Driscoll, 2011)

So with my changed conceptual perspective, perhaps it's time to stop calling myself an accidental youth worker? I am excitedly looking forward to the next stage of my journey as a Doctoral Researcher at the University of Cumbria, exploring the connection young people have with the natural environment: which brings me back to start of this paper, and the European Outdoor Education Network seminar. The theme of the seminar was 'Outdoor Learning as a means of promoting healthy and sustainable lifestyles and social inclusion for young people'. I was nominated by my supervisors to attend the seminar, and excitedly agreed. I felt honoured and privileged to be nominated and I took great care planning my contribution, a workshop exploring people's values and experiences. Then, I reviewed the list of other attendees, and I began to feel a fraud: not enough of an outdoor educator or clever enough amongst them. What if they expected me to go kayaking or mountaineering or some other risky, adventurous outdoor sport? How would I cope?

It was with some trepidation that I travelled to the seminar. Heart in mouth I walked through the door, expecting to be overwhelmed by the sight of so many, fit, sporty, overtly-healthy outdoor educators. Instead I was grabbed in a bear hug by a woman I'd met earlier this year: another Doctoral Researcher at the University of Cumbria, a youth worker like me, with whom I'd felt an instant connection at first meeting. My delight (and relief) at seeing her appeared to be mirrored in her face. I did not feel so alone.

Over the course of the next few days, through the various activities, discussions and workshops, I discovered there were many others like me: people who love mountains, but are just as happy looking at them from below as standing on top; people who would rather find a tree (or standing stone) to hug (or photograph), than conquer the high ropes; people who would rather sit under a tree reading a book, than attempt to climb it. I also discovered that I was not the only one who felt intimidated by those who had led more adventurous outdoor lives than me: that there were others for whom the words 'an adventure outside' meant a trip to the local park, rather than trekking in the Andes! And I felt a sense of belonging in this world, where we can comfortably share our love for nature and being outside, and our belief that we can communicate this to others.

My workshop was on the last full day of the conference. The group was a nice size of about 10-15 people and I encouraged them to work in three small groups to discuss and explore their experiences, motivations and values. I made use of a creative activity called the tree of life, providing them with pens and paper to record their thoughts. If time had allowed, we could have used more creative materials, for example leaves, bark and other natural craft materials. I felt that I had been successful in generating a relaxed, gentle atmosphere that encouraged sharing of thoughts. Afterwards, one of the participants thanked me by saying that he had really enjoyed the session, not just for the content but for the 'lovely' way I had delivered it; a simple comment, but one that meant so much to me. My approach had been different to others, perhaps a little less 'academic' than some, however it had been a good way of encouraging us to explore together, to discover new things about ourselves as well as others and to make new connections.

I left the seminar feeling a sense of kinship. There IS space in Outdoor Education for all of us, whatever we choose to call ourselves. Perhaps the biggest challenge for us all is how to ensure that we do not inadvertently intimidate or discourage others from joining us. How do we achieve genuine social inclusion, where everyone feels able to participate? This is something I will be considering at greater depth within my doctoral studies.

## Notes

i) The "What is Outdoor Learning?" research was undertaken by Dr. Roger Greenaway, author of publications such as 'Playback'. The idea for the research project came from the English Outdoor Council, and has been funded by IOL. "What is Outdoor Learning?" research was published in 2005 and is available from <http://www.outdoor-learning.org/Default.aspx?tabid=207> (Accessed November 2012)

ii) Teen Rangers Project: From October 2006 until December 2007 the Teen Ranger Project was managed by Tracy Hayes on behalf of Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust in association with Leicestershire County Council. Between January 2008 and 2010 the Teen Ranger Project was an independent organisation. The aims were:

- To provide new opportunities for positive activities for young people where none currently exist, with an emphasis on teamwork as well as individual development.
- To create high quality informal, fun ways for young people to discover, explore, conserve and learn more about their natural environment.
- To encourage and support young people to become role models/ambassadors to share their experiences with other young people and the wider community.
- To introduce young people to volunteering as a way of being active members of their community, helping to promote the ethics of active citizenship.
- To promote a positive image of young people involved in conservation and environmental activities.
- To recognise and reward the achievements of Teen Rangers participants through appropriate and relevant accreditation schemes.
- To involve young people in the planning, running and development of the Teen Ranger Project.
- To meet the requirements of Every Child Matters and develop an individual's Key Skills.

iii) For an explanation of youth work training and the JNC framework please see National Youth Agency website: <http://www.nya.org.uk/workforce-and-training/want-to-work-in-youth-work>

iv) To comply with ethical guidelines this research participant has been granted anonymity.

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## **Outdoor Learning with Families: A political activity-**

*Abstract: Outdoor and experiential learning is often evaluated and discussed in terms of personal and social development outcomes and impact. However, although less often explored, experiential learning can also be examined from a critical theory perspective to uncover its political meaning and potential. This paper presents a case study of a programme which works with families through outdoor and experiential learning and examines the arguments for a closer examination of work with families through the lens of power. In exploring 'family' as a political and gendered discourse, there is a powerful argument to examine the potential for critical learning in the relatively new practice of outdoor learning and family interventions.*

*This paper takes a critical theory perspective to discuss findings from a small scale research project I undertook as a pilot to my PhD study.*

### **Case study**

*The Moorside Family Centre\* began 35 years in an area of outstanding beauty but also one which has been devastated by the closure of key industries. The district includes numerous pockets of families with multiple disadvantages and rural isolation. In some key areas the population is classed as 30% disadvantaged. Employing over 70 staff and working with over 40 volunteers, the centre works with key partners to provide a wide range of services and activities for children and their families. The Centre is committed to tackling poverty in all its forms – material, emotional and aspirational by supporting families in tackling debt, and targeting adult and infant mental health.*

*The Centre develops services around the needs of individual families, with a 'can do' attitude to meeting new need and aspiration. It has developed a number of programmes to work with the family as a unit including evidence-based programmes, therapeutic groups for families experiencing bereavement of separation, and arts and crafts.*

*The Families Outdoors\* programme was the initiative of two women who were rehoused in a local hostel with their children. The children experienced bullying at school for their different accents and found it hard to settle. Getting together, these women approached the Moorside Family Centre for support to get them out as a family doing outdoor activities. They began by canoeing in the harbour – and a new programme of family work was born. One of the women now works for the Centre and has developed the Families Outdoor programme over the last 15 years.*

*(\*Names have been changed)*

*'[Families Outdoors] project aims to develop positive family relationships through play and challenge in the outdoors.'*

*The programme includes a range of activities such as canoeing, walking, ghyll scrambling, climbing and archery. Located close to the sea and mountains, challenging activities and opportunities to experience profound beauty can be found within a 45 minute drive of the Centre.*

*The programme includes a mixture of challenging and fun activities to engage families in playing together and building positive relationships. Whilst positive outcomes for the individual of outdoor experiences have been well documented – confidence building, communication skills, social and team building skills – this project offers new insights into the specific contribution outdoor experiences can make to effective work with families.*

*The Families Outdoors programme appears to be embedded in the principles and approach of informal education underpinned with the ethical principles of treating people with respect, respect for the rights of people to make their own decisions and choices, and the promotion of social justice (NYA 2005). The programme offers opportunities for participants to choose to participate and choose who they participate with. It is a non-directive, asset model of working based on the skills and strengths participants already have.*

*The programme places a lot of emphasis on play as a means to develop warm and positive relationships between family members. Whilst all activities encourage playfulness, opportunities for spontaneous, child-led play also have the potential to encourage adults to listen to children, to gain insights into their worlds and understandings of it. Activities engage parents and children in exploring imaginative and creative responses to problems and possibilities around them. Play is important in re-establishing bonds, getting to know each other and imagining ways forward particularly for families who have been separated or affected by loss or significant trauma.*

*In this project young people having the opportunity to take the lead is important. Youth work approaches focus on young peoples' participation and the development of self-efficacy and agency. These aims are visible in the work of Families Outdoors. Workers encourage parents to listen to and be led by their children. Learning experientially outdoors provides space to reconfigure relationships and experiment with different behaviours. Workers model managed risk taking and positive ways of handling conflict. Families Outdoors offers everyone involved opportunities to experience success, accepting their starting points and building on strengths.*

My involvement in the Families Outdoors project arose through my PhD research in 'Residential and Outdoor Experiences and Family Interventions', working with two other organisations that more recently have developed their own programmes working with families through outdoor and experiential learning. I was invited to undertake a small research project, working alongside the Families Outdoors programme as a participant observer, and help the organisation tell this part of its story to external stakeholders. For me, it has been a re-exploration of my own roots in community-development, my experience in working with young people through outdoor learning, and as an academic, my interest in developing professional knowledge in the youth & community work field.



## **Political perspectives and critical theory**

There are many ways to discuss this case study, its outcomes, impacts and theoretical underpinning. I have chosen to focus on the political meaning of this programme and consider how critical theory invites us to examine practice in its social and political context, through the lens of power. This means questioning the assumptions that underpin practice. Critical theory examines structural power relationships and develops a critical understanding of how power operates in society to create social inequality. Jay W Roberts (2012) in *Beyond Learning by Doing* identifies 'Experience and the Political' as one of the theoretical perspectives from which experiential education can be viewed. In support of this perspective Roberts cites Reynolds (1999) in stressing the importance of paying attention to the political significance of experiential learning:

"The political current views experience through the lens of power, either as a tool for reproducing inequalities or as a means for emancipation" (Reynolds cited in Roberts 2012: 69).

Failure to appreciate the political significance of experiential learning is to run the risk of imposing dominant and culturally specific ideas on people who are already marginalised in society, thus perpetuating inequalities. Critical theory informs practice which is critical of its own power and role, reflective and committed to social change.

The Moorside Family Centre works with families in a variety of ways including its 'home-grown' programme of working with families through outdoor and experiential learning. Having long established and trusted relationships with the communities it serves, this centre is able to provide sustained and informed relationships with the people who participate in its programmes that many short-term projects fail to establish (NESS, 2007). It also works from a needs-led principle, where provision is developed in response to expressed need rather than government dictate. The power to inform and drive provision is therefore located within the communities it serves. The Families Outdoors programme began from such an expressed need. It began 15 years ago, before the Labour Government's Sure Start and Think Family strategies (DCFS, 2008, 2009) and long before the coalition government's concerns with Britain's troubled and forgotten families (DCLG, 2012). However, it did develop as a response to social exclusion as experienced by the families involved.

## **'Family' and social policy**

'The family' has become an increasing focus of social policy in the UK over the last 15 years. Legislation and strategies have evolved which locate a range of social issues such as anti-social behaviour, youth offending and school exclusion within the family. Public funding for work with families has become targeted at families with complex needs and based on payment by results such as school attendance, entry into employment and prevention of further offending (CLG, 2012). In contrast to preferred evidence-based approaches, community-based family centres have continued their long tradition of working with families through informal education drawing on the theoretical perspectives of critical pedagogy developed by Paulo Freire (1970). The voluntary and community sectors are recognised both as potential providers of intensive interventions, and the most appropriate location for a

variety of early intervention programmes. A look through the list of programmes funded by the Big Lottery, Improving Futures funding stream, identifies a range of innovative approaches such as asset-based community development, mentoring and volunteering (Big Lottery 2012). These approaches have been identified through sustained interaction with communities. Early intervention with families in the UK is however now dependant on funding from the voluntary sector despite a strong case being made of a significant social return on investment (Barclays Wealth, 2011).

To enter into any form of family work without an understanding of the family as social construct is naïve if not dangerous. Sociology of the Family is now a wide field which examines the family as a dynamic social construct which changes over time in relationship to the political, cultural and historical context (Gillies, 2003). Family forms and household constitutions continue to undergo significant changes with increased divorce and separation, single parent households and re-configured families. Children are brought up in a variety of family networks, often more extensive than acknowledged by policy makers, and including grandparents, aunts, uncles and significant others. Whether these changes are viewed as organic responses to a changing social climate, or signalling the breakdown of a key institution is a matter of ideological perspective. Gillies notes that despite statistical analysis also demonstrating the continuity of traditional family ties, notions of change and transformation drive current policies and interventions.

The Families Outdoors programme resists the temptation to reinforce or privilege any particular family form; instead it works with family groups as defined by the participating adults. Parents decide which members of the family will take part in its programme. Parents may choose to take part with one of more of their children – perhaps older children for whom they have had little time since the birth of younger children, or children from whom they have been apart because of care orders, or separation from a partner. Other significant adults also participate. Reflecting the make –up of many families in the area, most of the participating families are headed by women with some, but few fathers participating. The flexibility of this model of working embraces the individual arrangements of families including same-sex partnerships.

### **‘Family’ as political and gendered discourse**

‘The Family’ is also a subject of political discourse which articulates political ideas and priorities. There is a political reason, an ideological purpose for the increased attention that families are receiving from politicians. The previous Labour government saw the family as a vehicle for its strategy to reduce child poverty and get adults back into employment under its social justice agenda (Social Exclusion Task Force, 2007). However, even notions such as social justice have ideological underpinnings which may vary from party to party. Is social justice about alleviating poverty as a matter of human rights and dignity, or to alleviate the financial burden of the poor on the tax payer, thus demonising the unemployed, the single-parent?

Neither is the discourse of family gender neutral. Feminists have for decades challenged gendered family roles and the assumption that women will provide the domestic and

emotional support of families, whilst being financially dependent on their partner. Despite shifts in work place legislation and equal employment rights, a fundamental contradiction of values is still embedded in current social policy which aims to get women back into work, but with a continued emphasis on the woman as nurturer and carer (Aapola et al, 2005). Childcare and support for carers are being reduced under austerity measures and women continue to find themselves torn between work and family, having to choose low paid, part-time work or remaining on decreasing welfare benefits.

In social policy, 'family' has become synonymous with 'parent', whilst 'parent' in most case implies 'mother'. Penketh (2011) notes how poor mothers have been "demonised by policies" whilst the "wrath of politicians and the media" has been directed at single mothers. Teenage parents, meaning mothers, are viewed as a burden on the welfare system, a system defined by white middle-class men which fails to consider the standpoint of young women themselves (Aapola et al, 2005). The politics which inform social policy making are gendered and pay little attention to the impact of class, culture or new generations of family structures and functioning.

Key questions therefore need to be asked of any family-based intervention and its underlying assumptions: Social justice or social control? Social Change or maintaining status quo? Are these interventions maintaining or challenging patriarchal structures? Emancipation or reinforcing inequalities? How do our own ideas and behaviours reflect the dominant discourse expressed by politicians and the media?

A look at some of the background statistics of the communities of the Moorside Family Centre reveal that levels of family and relationship stability are poor, a contributory factor being drug and alcohol fuelled domestic violence. As a result many children have lost significant adults in their lives and at least a third of all referrals to the centre feature maternal depression. Women experience specific and significant impacts of poverty. Therefore, practices committed to addressing poverty and achieving greater equality and inclusion need to consider the specific marginalisation of women and children and the structures and institutions which reinforce this.

The importance of understanding work with families as value-based is key. The Moorside Family Centre defines its aims as: "to provide support for children and families throughout (NW) so that every child might have equality of opportunity to achieve their full potential. "

What does this mean for practice development? The political does not mean party political although some of the discussion above can be attributed to different party political strategies. Rather, the political refers to an understanding of how power operates in our decision-making and interactions.

## **Critical learning**

Experiential learning can offer something different, something other than the 'assertive' and 'persistent' approaches of family intervention projects (Langan, 2011 p.158 ). Starting with participants' own definition of their strengths and aspirations experiential education offers a chance to explore their relationships and their wider experiences from different perspectives

and through new eyes; to engage in critical conversation about their struggles and frustrations, but also their hopes and aspirations and imagine new ways of being. Bell hooks refers to this critical education process as “writing a new narrative of freedom and power” from the experience and ways of knowing of oppressed and exploited groups (hooks, 1994).

But critical pedagogy is more than a set of tools or approaches; it is a political commitment to education as liberation and emancipation. Freire’s approach to critical pedagogy emphasised the learning process as dialectical based on an equal relationship between teacher and learners, valuing and validating experience and knowledge of all. To embrace the principles of critical pedagogy therefore means making a commitment to its underpinning values and to relationship building which acknowledges and works with existing power dynamics. Workers need to be willing to reflect on their own position of power and their own impact. To open up and examine our own experiences and values opens up possibilities of mutual learning rather than the imposition of dominant cultural norms and solutions. Such an approach privileges the voice of participants rather than the ‘expert’ teacher. Feminists have focused on the voice and narratives of women as different ways of seeing and ‘voicing’ the world and imagining new futures (Belenky et al 1986; Gilligan, 1982). More recently, researchers working with children and young people have highlighted the previous neglect of young peoples’ voices and together researchers and youth workers have explored many ways to gather and amplify the voices of young people in public arenas (Fine, 1992; Morrow, 1998; Warin, 2010). These values also underpin approaches to anti-oppressive practice developed in social work and youth work fields (Dominelli, 2002; Thompson, 2003).

Roberts acknowledges that the political construction of experience is “the least emphasised stance” on experiential learning (2012:69). He reflects on experience as political from a perspective of what ‘it could be’ rather than what ‘it is’. Whilst I agree that it is important to recognise the potential of this perspective, I would argue that Families Outdoors is evidence of ‘what is’. Outdoor spaces provide opportunities to break from the usual routines and dynamics of daily life, to interrupt familiar ways of being and doing, and provide an opportunity to see self and others through new eyes. Personal development and increased self-confidence and esteem assist in building more confident and resilient family relationships that benefit all family members. These in turn support the empowerment of family members to imagine and make changes of their own – to increase self-efficacy and agency. Interaction with the outdoors can increase belief in the ability to make intentional actions in the world (Stuart & Maynard, 2012).



Some of the women who were involved in the Families Outdoors had gone on to work with the Centre’s Parents Forum; others had gone to enrol on the Progression course – a partnership with a local college offering personal development and employability training; some are now volunteering; young people have gone on to join boys groups and girls groups. I heard time and again of lives being ‘saved’ and ‘turned’ around and a massive development in the quality of family life and relationships. Whilst the frustration of swimming against a tide of rising unemployment and welfare cuts cannot be under-estimated, the work of the

centre has had a significant impact on the social and economic well-being of families in the district.

My experience of FO programme evidences what critical pedagogy can be. It is true to say that the Families Outdoor programme has not developed a conscious approach to critical learning; rather, it has grown out of the aspirations and actions of individuals and the organisation to bring about change for themselves and others. It was a response to negative experiences of violence and social exclusion. It is an example of how women can exercise their agency to change their world and collectively to share and learn from experience to build effective social networks.

## **Conclusion**

This small scale research project illustrates the potential contribution that experiential and outdoor learning can make to work with families. It also highlights the importance of realising and examining the political dimensions of experiential and outdoor learning in relation to the families we work with and the agendas that accompany that work. I am in no doubt that critical theory and critical feminist theory offer an enormous potential for a deeper exploration of the meaning, practice and impact of outdoor and experiential learning, and work with families. They invite practitioners to join together in a reflective critique of dominant discourses, new practices and approaches to outdoor learning and an understanding of and engagement with its transformative potential.



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## Mountains as Inspiration-Changing Perceptions

The mountains of the Lake District were seldom visited in the early eighteenth century and were thought of as desolate and uninviting. During 1724, Daniel Defoe published the first volume of *“A Tour Thro’ the Whole Island of Great Britain”* in which he claimed that Westmorland was: “the wildest, most barren and frightful of any that I have passed over in England, or even Wales itself”...

By the middle of the century perceptions of beauty in landscape painting and landscapes themselves were changing. In 1768, William Gilpin, an Anglican cleric and artist published an *“Essay on Prints”* in which he defined the characteristics of “picturesque” landscapes. Views should be intricate and varied without straight lines and contain particular elements, such as trees and rustic cottages in the foreground and distance.

In 1778 Thomas West produced *“A Guide to the Lakes”* and recommended viewpoints or “stations” where tourists could enjoy the best views of the landscape, being encouraged to appreciate the formal qualities of the landscape and to apply aesthetic values.

During this time there was growing interest in the notion of the “sublime”. This concept was rekindled in Britain by an Irish philosopher, Edmund Burke who in 1757 wrote *“A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful”*. He argued that the sublime was beyond beauty, it had the power to entrance and produce feelings of awe, wonder and terror. Beauty could present itself in a field of flowers, whereas huge pinnacles of rock, cataracts and glaciers, which intimidated us and made us feel small, were considered sublime.

These ideas produced an interest in the wilder, more mountainous areas of Britain, particularly the Lake District. They coincided with a period of improved transport in the 1780’s and 1790’s and a time when travel in continental Europe was restricted. This enthusiasm for the Lake District was further enhanced by William Wordsworth and the Romantic poets extolling the virtues of wild nature and dramatic landscapes. In 1810 William Wordsworth published his *“Guide to the Lakes”*, which was so popular it went to a fifth edition.

Whereas earlier travellers to the Lakes were content to view the “picturesque” and “sublime” from a comfortable distance in the valleys, there was a growing interest in getting closer to the drama and exploring the mountains. The poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge epitomised this thirst for adventure in his wanderings across the Lake District fells and his near misadventure in descending a rock chimney on Scafell. Robert Macfarlane (2003) in *“Mountains of the Mind”* describes how Coleridge’s escapades began a century of risk taking in the mountains. Wealthy landed and professional men and women travelled to the Alps to pit their wits on rock, snow and ice. The mountains became testing grounds for developing their physical prowess and mental character. John Ruskin, the artist and writer was critical of the self-conceit and self-satisfaction of the new breed of Alpinists: “The Alps themselves, which your



own poets loved so reverently, you regard as soaped poles in a bear garden, which you set yourself to climb and slide down again with shrieks of delight". But many more recent climbers have extolled the delights of climbing: "Far from doping it actually stimulates our senses and our intelligence. So that we see, feel, hear and appreciate through our trance with an almost unnatural intensity...." (Geoffrey Winthrop Young cited in his biography by Alan Hankinson).

### **Mountains for Education and Training.**

As Britain became more industrialised and urbanised during the nineteenth century there was an increasing trend towards recreation in the countryside. Early developments to encourage individual and group enjoyment of the outdoors were the founding of the Cyclists' Touring Club in 1878, the Co-operative Holidays Association in 1891, the National Trust in 1895, the Boy Scouts in 1908 and the Girl Guides in 1910. Later, in the 1930's many workers fought strongly for the right to have access to the uplands and there were mass trespasses on Kinder Scout in Derbyshire.

Mountains and sea formed an important backcloth to the development of adventure education in Britain. The Outward Bound Trust was established in 1946 with early schools set up at Aberdovey in Wales and Eskdale and Ullswater in the Lake District. Their 4 week courses were characterised by an emphasis on personal development training, particularly designed to encourage confidence, self-discipline and leadership. Field studies also became popular in upland environments. Although they had been developed in private schools and universities during the nineteenth century, the setting up of the Field Studies Council in 1943 gave impetus to the use of the outdoors for scientific investigation.

The 1944 Education Act proposed that "a period of residence in a school camp or other boarding school in the country would contribute substantially to the health and width of outlook of any child from a town school..." Further expansion followed the Newsom Report in 1963 which advocated the benefits of outdoor and residential experiences for all young people. As a result during the 1960s and 1970s many local authorities and charities set up field and outdoor education centres.

In 1972 Harold Drasdo wrote a classic pamphlet, "Education and the Mountain Centres". He identifies three strands in outdoor learning: field studies which develop the intellect, outdoor sports which develop physical skills and outdoor adventure which develops personal qualities. Although he acknowledges the benefits of these approaches, he argues that they are limited and paints a wider canvas in which the outdoors and adventure allow us to relate to beauty, nature, literature, art and freedom of spirit.

### **Do the mountains speak for themselves?**

John Muir writing "*Our National Parks*" in 1901 extolled the virtues of mountains, "*Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like autumn leaves.*"

A journey into the mountains offers a breathing space from the clutter and day to day anxieties of life and can inspire curiosity and learning, but is there a greater role for outdoor educators? A debate arose in Outward Bound during the 1960's about whether outdoor education should be based on pure experience or whether the experience should be discussed and processed by the leader for the benefit of the participants. The arguments for both approaches are clearly stated by Thomas James (1980) in his classic paper, "*Can mountains speak for themselves*". Many leaders have adopted the processing model of "plan, do, review" which gives structure to the experience, encourages transfer of learning and helps justify it in terms of the demands of the education system. Leaders facilitate learning towards desired outcomes. This approach may restrict chance or individual learning and lead to a highly organised, rigid structure which has been compared to an industrial process (Greenaway 2008). Clearly some outdoor experiences lend themselves to reviewing led by the leader whilst at other times individuals will benefit from being allowed to absorb the experience or share their thoughts informally with others in the group. Andy Williams (2006) emphasises the importance of serendipitous learning and co-learning between leaders and participants. He states that we need to be more honest in recognizing that unplanned learning and co-learning can be just as significant as our planned outcomes.

### **Mountains –a stimulus for discussion and enquiry**

The special nature of mountains as a space beyond everyday existence has been recognized by many writers (Cooper 1998). Robert Macfarlane (2003) claims that "*by speaking of greater forces than we can possibly invoke, and by confronting us with greater spans of time than we can possibly envisage, mountains refute our excessive trust in the man-made. They pose profound questions about our durability and the importance of our schemes.*" Mountains provide an arena for discussing and reflecting on some of the wider issues affecting our lives.

I believe in the value of the serendipitous experience as mentioned earlier but also think that mountain experiences can inspire critical thinking and discussion. This can be facilitated by the leader recognising opportunities to raise questions: "*there are often issues over the use of land for recreation, conservation, quarrying, afforestation or water supply.....also the chance to consider the need to protect and manage mountain landscapes and appreciate how decisions are made by governments and landowners.*" (Cooper 1998). Mountains can demonstrate inter-relationships between rock, soil, plants and animals and help us appreciate that we are a part of an ecosystem.

Preparing and packing for a journey into the mountains whether for a day or a longer expedition is an ideal opportunity to discuss the concepts of "needs" and "wants". What clothing, food and shelter do we need to make our journey enjoyable and safe? What items can be left behind? These concepts can be widened to discuss other environments and people existing and meeting their basic needs on other parts of our planet.

One method I have used with groups in the mountains to encourage thinking and discussion is Philosophy for Children based on the work of Matthew Lipman (1980). This places the participants at the heart of the learning. The discussion is triggered by a "stimulus" which

could be a mountain view, clouds, an animal in the wild, a rock, a flower, a spring. The “stimulus” gives rise to questions, “How was that valley formed?”, “Where did this rock come from?”, “What do these animals eat?”, “Where does the water start and where does it go to?” “Has this view always been the same?” Some of these questions can be answered by the leader or others in the group. Ask smaller groups to then consider more open, philosophical questions: “What makes a beautiful view?” “Why are wild places, like mountains, important?” “Are some animals more special than others?” “Should we allow wind farms in the mountains?” “What gives us a good quality of life?” Each group proposes a question, explaining it to the others. The agreed set of questions is then put forward to the whole group and there is time to reflect and ask for further clarification. They are then asked to vote on the question they wish to consider for their philosophical enquiry. The discussion has a particular style in which each person has a chance to express their feelings and thoughts and the leader plays a key role in facilitating an open, democratic, non-threatening discussion, seeking deeper thinking and reflection by posing more searching questions on the topic.

Clearly, not all mountain experiences lend themselves to this form of philosophical enquiry; they are affected for example by the task, the journey ahead, the aims for the group and the vagaries of the weather. Sometimes the experience is enough, the mountain speaks for itself, but on other occasions there are opportunities for the leader to enrich the experience and help young people improve their thinking skills, express their views and develop their values which will influence wider aspects of their lives.

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## **‘What does it mean to me?’: Exploring the impact of outdoor learning on young people’s attitudes to sustainability**

### **Summary of the session**

This paper explored the impact of outdoor learning on young people’s attitudes to sustainability. Much of the content drew on a recent review of literature conducted by Christie and Higgins (2012)\*. I began by exploring the audiences own interpretations of sustainability and their connection and current contact with nature. For example, I posed questions such as ‘what does sustainability mean to you?’, ‘when did you last look at a view with no buildings?’ and ‘when did you last walk through a forest?’ and we discussed our responses. This process allowed the audience to reflect on their understanding of the specific conference themes addressed in the paper; ‘outdoor learning’, ‘sustainability’ and ‘connection or connectedness to nature’. Further, it illustrated the cultural and individual nuances that can often shape our understanding of the term sustainability and influence our conception of nature and our place within the environment.

Once we had given thought to our own connection to nature and ourselves as part of nature, I then posed two further questions: first, ‘would we have held the same values when we were younger?’ and second, ‘should we impose our current value system onto young people today?’. To answer the second of those questions, I briefly explored the current social, economic and environmental issues which may face the current generation of young people, before considering if we had a moral obligation (as educators, parents, guardians and so on) to prepare young people to face the challenges that they are likely to encounter in their lifetime.

I then moved the discussion forward by considering whether outdoor learning, as part of mainstream education, could offer opportunities for young people to develop a closer relationship with nature and in doing so help them to develop an ethic of care towards their environment. In other words, could practices in outdoor learning lead to attitudinal changes towards sustainable lifestyles amongst young people. To investigate this further, I highlighted a recent research project that I was involved in - Greenways to Health (Christie and Higgins, 2010) - which evaluated the impact of a small-scale, school-based environmental project designed to develop 12-13 year olds ‘connectedness to nature’, amongst other outcomes. The research, specifically the group interview process, highlighted a number of issues. Firstly, a degree of ambiguity surrounded the term ‘connectedness to nature’; secondly, due to the ambiguity of the term and their lack of environmental knowledge some young people found it difficult to articulate their thoughts, and so answer the interview questions; and, thirdly, it appeared that their prior experience and their values (gained, for example, through family or school life) influenced their understanding of, and their attitude towards, sustainable behaviour. Combined, these three findings suggest that there may be an issue surrounding young people’s lack of environmental knowledge and familiarity with key ecological concepts. And, further, this may influence their ability to fully understand their place and role

within nature and the environment more generally. At this point, I suggested that perhaps if young people were more comfortable with environmental language and had a grasp of basic ecological principles (such as, carbon cycles, foodwebs or population dynamics) then they would feel more at ease discussing these issues and their connection to their environment.

To ground this assertion within environmental literature, I suggested that this notion of environmental knowledge closely reflected Capra's (2009) work on ecological literacy; which is defined as 'our ability to understand the basic principles of ecology and to live accordingly' (p.245). I suggested that perhaps within an educational context, ecological literacy, could be related to both teachers and young people, equally. As, if we follow my assertion that young people need to develop their ecological awareness, to do so effectively requires those that teach, work with and parent young people to be eco-literate so that they can help them (young people, family and others) to understand the impact of their actions and encourage them to see how those actions can make a positive difference to the world around them. Further, this desire to develop an eco-literate society is heightened if we locate this within the social, economic and environmental context that these young people will face in their future.

Given this challenging, broader, global context, I stressed the importance of highlighting to young people that they can make changes to the way in which they act and behave. Using the example of the Greenways research (where they built a small pond) I illustrated how young people can have a positive effect locally (in their school grounds or community) and in turn can contribute to other environmental projects and to sustainable development on a wider level. Through community- and school-based projects young people can begin to see how they can become positive agents of change and see the real and often immediate consequences of their actions. As such, I stressed the importance of ensuring that young people realise that environmental issues and sustainable development are not issues to be dealt with by government and 'others', they (young people) can be 'agents of change' and are capable of making a difference (Barrat and Barrat Hacking, 2008; Fielding and Head, 2012).

At this point I stressed that there is a cautionary note here, however, as the development of an ecoliterate society must be weighted against the danger of over-burdening young people to the point where they may feel that they are helpless and unable to deal with the uncertain future ahead of them. Sobel (1996) offers a way to conceptualise this issue with the term 'eco-phobia'; which, can be understood as the broad fear of environmental problems which he believes are characterised by feelings of helplessness and pessimism about the future. Therefore, whilst I feel that future work with young people should take account of the issue of eco-literacy and encourage greater awareness of environmental and sustainability issues, it should do so within a supportive, optimistic context that highlights clear ways to take positive action and so ameliorate feelings of helplessness and pessimism.

This finding supports the general tenor of the literature review that I was involved in (Christie and Higgins, 2012), which suggests that:

- teachers and pupils need to develop their ecological literacy and gain a sound understanding of key ecological principles so that they can begin to fully understand the impact of their actions and take positive steps towards managing their behaviour;

- schools and local communities need to empower young people to realise that their actions are valued and have a consequence and that they can make a difference to the world around them; and
- adults, teachers and others need to create opportunities for young people to have direct hands on experiences in nature, so that they (young people) can develop a sense of place and connection to their local area and the wider world around them.

(Christie and Higgins, 2012)

I concluded the paper by contextualising these points in terms of Scotland's general approach towards outdoor learning and sustainability education. Currently, policy guidance exists (Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning (Learning and Teaching Scotland\*\*, 2010)) which states that 'the journey through education for any child in Scotland must include opportunities for a series of planned, quality outdoor learning experiences' (p. 5). This demonstrates the strong governmental support for outdoor learning within Scotland. Further, it suggests that the provision of such outdoor learning experiences, as part of a child's formal schooling, can be regarded as the school's and teacher's duty. This context then, offers the potential to develop eco-literacy, through outdoor learning, at a teacher and pupil level and in a strategic and progressive way, for those young people who pass through mainstream education in Scotland.

In summary, I set out to explore the impact of outdoor learning on young people's attitudes to sustainability and to suggest that outdoor learning is well placed to deliver positive, connecting experiences which would encourage young people to develop an ethic of care towards local places and the broader environment. Additionally, I wanted to explore how ecologically literate teachers can help to enlighten, enrich and guide young people through these experiences, and provide them with the language, skills and confidence necessary to critically reflect on their role and place within the environmental processes around them. This in turn, creates a platform for development of positive attitudes towards sustainability. And, finally, I wanted to frame this within the current Scottish context and highlight how this approach is looking increasingly viable within schools and Teacher Training Institutions across Scotland.

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\* Please email [beth.christie@ed.ac.uk](mailto:beth.christie@ed.ac.uk) for a copy of the literature review or visit the University of Edinburgh Outdoor Education section website <http://www.edinburgh.ed.ac.uk/outdoored>

\*\* In 2011 Learning and Teaching Scotland was merged with Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education Scotland and now the organisation is now called 'Education Scotland'.

## **Alcohol, drug and substance abuse. Outdoor learning of young people: Self-responsibility between motivation and seduction.**

### **1 Abstract**

This paper reflects on the practical work and experiences of (outdoor) trainers in a socio-therapeutic context. Specifically, we report on six outdoor training projects that concentrated on groups of young people, former drug addicts, who have already attended a long-term rehabilitation program and who are supposed to be moving toward more psychological and social independence. The projects applied methods according to the concept of IOA® (Integrative Outdoor Activities®), an Austrian approach to outdoor training and experiential learning, in order to offer new behavioral possibilities to the participants and enhance personal development and change. Therefore this paper first outlines basic elements of the underlying concept. Then we discuss typical challenges, topics and psychological mechanisms that are relevant in the defined context of substance abuse, like the psychological constructs of motivation and seduction which are seen dialectically in the context of drug rehabilitation, as well as other related aspects like power, dependency and regression. We conclude with some practical recommendations for future projects dealing with this special target group.

### **2 The concept of IOA®**

#### **2.1 Basic assumptions**

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Integrative Outdoor Activities® represent an approach of experiential learning and outdoor training. In our work we always focus on action (physical activities and tasks) of persons and groups with regard to certain predefined aims and surrounding conditions. The central ideas of the concept are discussed and partly negotiated with the participants beforehand, they will be worked out within an agreed range (setting and aim) and, finally, evaluated together within the frame of reflection (retrospective thinking). This procedure constitutes the basis of the concept of IOA®.

Additionally, we assume that human beings develop themselves when they act. Thus, measures and methods will be applied that enable the participants to design and reflect their actions from multiple perspectives and to realize by acting options and pitfalls for their future development. In this understanding physical tasks and challenges enable an analysis of personal and group topics that are related to the (social) environment and to nature (IOA® 2009a, p. 5-6).



## 2.2 What does integrative mean?

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Integration can have different meanings. In one sense, the term integration implies directing the attention of all participants towards the conditions and factors that are crucial for the topical actions. The personal impressions are viewed according to significant and selected criteria by using a variety of methods for reflection. This meaning of integration is clearly distinguished from an arbitrary entirety or from accepting the principle that everything is somehow related to each other. On the contrary, integration would rather refer to a process of reconstructing a predefined entirety. We refer here to the original meaning of the term *integrare* from Latin, which means to “restore to a former condition, make as new, renew” (Glare 2009, p. 935).

Another aspect of integration refers to the fact that the concept of IOA® can be applied by skilled trainers in a very flexible way. It enables and facilitates the cooperation of persons from different professional fields (teachers, psychologists, psycho-therapists etc.) in order to reach a common target. Therefore a constant exchange of methods and perspectives is possible, that ensures the diversity of methods in a project. Of course for this purpose, it is also required that within the trainer team the needed qualifications in the field of the sports discipline, pedagogy and psychology are available in order to be able to work effectively and with a maximum of safety (Pfingstner 2005, 47).

Integration appears hence in the following principal realms:

- Integration of different theoretical and scientific approaches.
- Integration of indoor and outdoor activities.
- Integration of action and reflection (retrospective thinking).
- Integration of
  - body
  - cognition (spiritual recognition)
  - emotion (the soul, the feeling)
  - and their social conditionality.
- Integration of previous and subsequent conditions (settings):  
Immediate events concerning the group are discussed because they heavily influence the current working behavior.
- Integration of cultural diversity.
- Integration of a gender-sensitive approach and path of action:  
In a gender-sensitive training situation the cooperation of both sexes will be a central point, respecting the particularities of each individual. We work deliberately on the social constructions of gender roles and its practical implications in the lived-in world (IOA® 2009a, p. 7).

## 2.3 The concept of nature

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Of course, nature as a space for experiences plays a major role in the concept of IOA®, although outdoor methods represent only a part of the trainers' methodological repertoire. The natural environment constitutes the frame and the background that will be filled with

(symbolic) importance by the participants. Usually, we assume that there are different possible perceptions of nature in practical pedagogical, psychological and therapeutic work, like nature and its healing effects or nature as an obstacle (Schörghuber 1999, p. 38).

In the outdoor training setting, nature can also be seen as the stage on which human beings meet and move on together. There are plenty of occasions to get into contact and enter into a relationship with nature, e.g. via using our senses and collecting multiple perceptions and impressions. Additionally, we can use bodily movements for affective/emotional and physical learning purposes, if the embodied experience is accompanied professionally by the trainer during the reflection phase. The notion of embodied experiences through physical activities in nature refers to the only recently emerging sociological perspective that the body is fundamental and constitutive for social processes (embodiment of sociology, see also Humberstone 2011; Turner 1984, 1995; Shilling 2007; Gugutzer 2012).

In our perspective the concept of nature itself is seen as a social construction (Lesk & Gutmann 2010). This affects training situations that emphasize nature experience in several ways: Nature in this view can be used as an analogue learning field (Schörghuber 1996, p. 172). If nature is addressed in a process of self-awareness, it is necessary to focus on the relationship of persons to nature. Describing nature just as it is transfers nature into an object that seems to be disconnected from people. Whereas nature seen as an analogue learning field means that nature is to some extent similar to human beings. Persons are able to come into contact with nature, just as other people come into contact with each other. This is not meant to be in the reified sense, where a tree is described by its height and color, but by handling the relationship between the tree and the viewer. The relationship to trees is comparable to the relationship between persons. Nature can thus draw attention to certain parts of life or behavioral patterns. Many of these patterns are at first not recallable on a conscious level, but can be disclosed in the course of an outdoor training intervention.

The conditions which ensure that a person can get into contact with nature, is different from person to person. However, one element seems to be fundamental. It requires the ability to distinguish between being attentive towards the tree or being focused on oneself and asking how it feels to meet the tree.

To describe this relationship between nature and persons we can also say:

“In the relationship to nature [the tree, note from the authors] personal attitudes, physical postures, personal transmission patterns, societal values and, what we call nature, meet each other. The adapted and focused structuring of this relationship represents the job of educators and trainers.” (IOA® 2009b, p. 17)

## 2.4 Social norms and learning levels

The natural environment marks a constraint which trainers and participants have to confront. For instance, it is not easily possible to negotiate the weather or the stony path. In contrast, social norms are partially negotiable, expandable and learnable.

Nature is a fantastic stage for the exploration of social norms. Within natural outdoor settings the feedback on the realization of new or already known options for action is very direct. It

becomes evident to participants that their own patterns of behavior sometimes have not the intended effect. At other occasions their behavior even becomes more important and induces more relevant consequences and therefore will be discussed within the group.

Learning initiated by action takes place at all levels of personality, i.e. on the physical, cognitive, emotional and social level.

The following points describe the intervention cycle used by trainers, teachers and therapists, when leading groups in an outdoor setting (IOA® 2009c, p. 55; Kaltenecker 2006):

- Actions and action results are observed and described from different perspectives.
- From these perspectives we will deduct hypotheses on the backgrounds and connections of felt effects. So new, expanded options for action can be found and carried out.
- These are examined within new tasks and exercises.
- This procedure is repeated in various loops (circular).

The aim is to put persons and groups into a position in which they are able to identify suitable application rules (reflective behavior) in order to use the newly acquired knowledge in every-day situations. These new constructions might lead to further options for action. The transfer of the acquired knowledge from a training situation into an every-day situation is essential and needs to be accompanied and supervised professionally.

### **3 Challenges that arise in the socio-therapeutic context of drug rehabilitation**

In this section we mention topics that seem to be especially relevant according to our own working experience with the target group. We try to highlight their importance by describing their functions and effects in the training situation. We include here our observations as well as some hypotheses about the purposes and meanings of the listed psychological mechanisms and themes. In this context we also want to introduce the term of resilience which “describes a psychological quality that allows a person to cope with, and respond effectively to, life stressors” (Neill & Dias 2001, p. 39). Like Neill & Dias we use outdoor training programs to stimulate persons to meet future life challenges, although here the target group is a different one. We also want to stress the important role of appropriate trainer behavior to ensure the possibility of social support, development of an adequate group culture and communicative competences to allow for personal development and resilience. Outdoor education as a therapeutic tool to enhance social inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities was investigated by Brodin (2009, p. 111). She got similar results with regard to the role of competent trainers (educators) in the therapeutic setting.

#### **3.1 Regression and imagination as a chance for development and relatedness**

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Compared to other adolescents, socially disadvantaged young persons have very fragile and insecure personalities. They tend to act according to early childhood and usually expect undivided attention of an adult who appears to them as an ideal model to learn. At the same

time they also claim all rights of adult life for themselves. Therefore it is essential how much regression is allowed during the outdoor project.

Adolescents are considered to be capable of developing their future out of their fantasies, whereas adults usually realise only fantasies that match the conditions of the existing world. In this way the latter either live their imagination or reject it. Commonly created fantasies by adults and young persons can be used for linking purposes. Adolescents are dependent on their fantasies for self-development and adults can experience their repressed and forgotten ideas. Points of contact between the two parties are feasible. We challenge an attitude that disapproves imagination as phantasm in order to appear more prudent and experienced, because this might block autonomy and self-efficacy (Fliedl & Krafft-Ebing 1999, pp. 54-57).

### 3.2 Motivation and seduction in socio-therapeutic training settings

Through regular alcohol and drug abuse the dependence on human beings are replaced by the addiction to these substances. Drug addicts often show a narcissistic personality structure. For this reason relationships are seen as pure consumptions. Invitations for entering into interpersonal contact should be issued, just in case that the person wanted it. Some of the adolescents never knew relations that consisted of giving and taking reciprocally. On the contrary, social hostility and deprivation marked decisive phases of their lives. Hence, socially disadvantaged young persons often replace human relationships and dependencies on others through the consumption of substances and drugs. So relaxation, well-being and security that are usually found in relationships with human beings, seem calculable and more easily obtainable. The overall aim in the long-term drug therapy within the framework of IOA® projects is to find the way out of the dependence on substance and then to get back to a healthy addiction to other people (Burian 2003).

According to our observations, extrinsic motivation provoked through given incentives by other young people was felt by affected adolescents as a form of seduction and therefore sharply criticized by them. Such motivational strategies from other participants of the group were often compared with seductive situations among friends (drug culture), which symbolized somehow a return to drug abuse to the former drug addict. This view also complies with findings from organisational psychology, where within the framework of the so-called self-determination theory possible harmful effects of extrinsic rewards are investigated. They have a tendency to reduce intrinsic motivation and thus the interest in a specific task (Robbins & Judge 2013, pp. 242-244). In our setting of getting rid of a former addiction to substances in a sustainable way, it appears especially relevant to freely and autonomously decide on one's own future behaviour or put differently, to be fully intrinsically motivated to master the challenges of a new life. In these situations participants can only distinguish motivation from seduction through extrinsic incentives under certain conditions. Concerned persons need full transparency concerning the aims and conditions of an intervention. This is true for the group level (e.g. prevailing social norms) as well as for the individual level (the chosen action strategy of an adolescent must clearly lead into a positive direction of his/her own personal development).

### 3.3 Independence and clarification of relationships

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Whenever young persons are led into independence, margins of action should be offered to them. To ensure autonomy, the participants should be included into the decision-making process within a team. By reporting on six outdoor training projects we want to show in this section how this can be managed and to which extent those margins are utilized by the participants. We also ask, whether the goal of self-determination can only be reached via breaking rules or not.

The six outdoor training projects took place from 2005 to 2010 in Austria. Each project comprised three days of preparation with the group, four weeks of training and five days follow-up training. The groups were composed of six male adolescents aged from 16 to 18. The trainer team consisted of one outdoor trainer, one psychologists and one social pedagogue.

We describe here our insights from the experiences with the participants and our hypotheses about their behavioral patterns. During the project these young men were confronted with solvable tasks as well as with unchangeable facts (e.g. a tent must be shared by two persons, if the tent is too heavy to be carried alone.). Nevertheless, we tried to respect that adolescents with their individual characteristics will sometimes change the imposed constraints into voluntariness. The young men were usually inclined to prove themselves and fathom their limits. Male ideals were not only scrutinized, they were also developed.

We aimed to provide the adolescents with the safe feeling that although they were confronted with an ambiguous task, they always were accompanied and supported. In the case of arising problems, the young men were safeguarded from danger by the trainers in an appropriate way. However, in order to lead the youths into a greater autonomy and independence, the expectations of the group could not always be met to full extent. In other words we want to emphasize that the reaction of the team to constantly recurring patterns of behavior implies possible elements of physical danger which has to be handled in the training situation. We experienced that team cohesion was of great importance with regard to finding solutions and making decisions at the group level. A multitude of approaches were envisaged to encompass the group process. In this manner we tried to identify possibly dangerous deviations from development chances of the group or individuals and to be able to react accordingly.

### 3.4 Power in the training context

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Before and at the beginning of an outdoor training session the trainers have a lot of power because of their positions. They have to control structural aspects (time, place, design) and the obligation to claim for their powerful position if necessary. The conscious handling of power and powerlessness creates transparency and the possibility to use both as working media.

When working with youths on the subject of self-determination (personal freedom, power and powerlessness) any kind of heroism that is not embodied by the youths themselves, will be diametrically opposed to their chance of development. The idealization of trainers by participants will entail the danger of dependence instead of furthering independence.

Additionally, also the trainers could abuse their power in order to manipulate the participants. In this view, manipulation takes advantage of personal relationships to compensate for ambiguity concerning the content and relationship aspect of communicative situations (Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson 1990, pp. 53-56). Furthermore, there is some danger that groups are not willing to act in a self-responsible way and instead keep degrading into dependence towards the trainers. Thus, we should always be aware of both sides. Too much power on the one part creates powerlessness on the opposite part.

In this context König (1996) gives two practical advices, as the awareness and knowledge about the effects of unequal power distribution in relationships enable trainers to act in a responsible manner:

- Not to fulfill expectations of the group to the usual extent.
- To make observable developments, moods and emotions triggered by the role of the trainers accessible to the participants (via reflection, understanding and influencing).

In the outdoor training setting we try to support the debate about power related topics. We use specific exercises and discussion rounds, so that the participants will actively enter into contact with each other. Through constantly influencing and disclosing group processes, the phenomenon of power can be understood in its complexity and in this way be demystified. So an understanding of social processes can be developed and thus the range of action might be enlarged. In the training situation it should be avoided to create a system of power that cannot be challenged anymore (König 1996).

In everyday life, power phenomena have normally little experimental character. Power usually distributes chances in life and provokes frequently social inequalities. In the six reported outdoor training projects we produce an island (a protected setting), where power-related issues can be discussed on the individual and on the group level. During the reflection phase we do not intend to expose individuals, but we try to comprehend processes and to induce interest in those mechanisms. Gaining the (individual or group) competence to reflect is time consuming. Reflection can be considered as a ritual action that requires a certain amount of abrasion. When working with inexperienced groups, acquiring the competence of reflection must be seen as a separate learning step.

In the training context the connection and reciprocity between power, freedom and responsibility needs to be thought over. More freedom means more responsibility for individuals and for the group. This responsibility can be transferred to adolescents only in areas in which they are appropriately competent. Without the awareness of responsibility, the freedom of handling will rapidly change into abuse of power. Attained degrees of freedom usually stay within the groups, as long as the required responsibilities are given.

In the development of concepts, i.e. in the choice of routes, such viewpoints have to be considered. Different ways of life can be observed in the cohabitation of participants and they show differences in quality, whereby we have to ask the decisive question: "How much freedom offers a certain way of life?"

This question should be asked in respect of all participants because common acting needs those degrees of freedom. By obtaining a picture of the "freedom customs" of individual

participants we see, how much freedom they are used to live with. This provides us with answers to the following questions: “At what time feels participant 1 constrained and at which point is participant 2 overcharged?”

## **4 Implications for outdoor training projects**

### **4.1 Organisation and structure**

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The development of solution strategies and of interventions should always be regarded dynamically in a circular process. There are no uniform paths or recipes that always lead to the same outcomes. Therefore we need for each individual a solution that will depend on different conditions. In this section we mention some organizational and structural hints for future application based on our own experiences in the field.

- When designing a project, we should pay attention to make sure that the adolescents will have enough possibilities to participate and to take part in the decision process during the project. These degrees of autonomy should not involve the necessity to offend rules or to enter a forbidden zone.
- When hiking, various routes need to be prepared (for instance, variations in the routes to reach the next camp), so that the youths are able to participate in the planning of the route. The variations can also be offered as a multi-choice possibility to the group.
- The length of the outdoor project should be manageable and clear to the adolescents (not too long), but it should last long enough to force the adolescent into a development of new structures, procedures and practices.
- The trainers should withdraw from the group during certain phases of the project.
- There should be phases, where nothing is planned beforehand.

### **4.2 Methods**

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With respect to the existing power relations, we should always ask first who is in the position to claim for discussions and conversations and second when such talks can be claimed. We distinguish here between planned, predetermined discussions and spontaneously occurring talks during the breaks. For both situations the following guidelines are relevant.

- Beware of overcharging. In individual conversations trainers should observe the energy level of the adolescents continuously.
- During group discussions but also when talking about the daily program, trainers should stress, what has been decided that day by the group or by individual persons (“Today you produced the following, you decided on the following etc.”).
- The participants should know that all events and occurrences can be discussed openly. Trainers should be overtly available during certain time frames, they should actively show interest in the subjects and the willingness to listen.
- Generally, it is simpler to talk about subjects brought up by the youth than to discuss topics suggested by the trainer. Nevertheless, it is advisable to fix some subjects to be discussed in advance (at the beginning of the project) to avoid tendencies of repression in the course of the process.
- If groups get a lot of information, they need time to absorb. This is especially important, if a participant or the whole group are resisting. This time out is necessary in order to give



the person(s) the possibility to take up an event mentally, to categorize it and to integrate it into one's own thoughts.

#### 4.3 Options for interventions by the trainers

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In this section we collected some frequently used intervention techniques in our socio-therapeutic setting. (For further reading on interventions in the therapeutic setting we recommend Amesberger & Amesberger 1998.)

- Share selected responsibilities with the participant or transfer them entirely to him/her. This can be achieved by public talks between the trainers, whereby decisions and solutions are transferred to the group.
- Public discussions within the trainer team can be used to teach the group the importance of a constructive conflict culture. Conflicts are settled within the team, thus pushing the young men into the role of observers. They are most absorptive, when the origin of the conflict situation is not primarily connected to them, i.e. if the conflict can be regarded as an intra team conflict (which, of course, is also connected to them, but the aim is not to provoke the feeling of guilt). A positive ending of the intra (trainer) team conflict has a tranquilizing effect on the group.
- Well cooperating trainer teams can take over conflicts from the individual youth.
  - If a participant is in conflict with the trainer 1, trainer 2 may take the position of the youth in the conflict. Now trainer 2 can discuss the conflict from his/her adopted youth position and subsequently transfer the solution to the youth.
  - If trainer 2 takes over the conflict from the youth, it may be sufficient that trainer 2 supports the youth during the conflict, but leaves the part of discussion to him/her. This support may take the form of clarifying words, or might occur simply by being physically present which could procure security to the youth.

### 5 Summary

This paper reflects on the practical experiences of outdoor trainers in the field of social therapy. In the course of six outdoor training projects we worked methodologically with the concept of IOA® (Integrative Outdoor Activities®) and with the overall aim to accompany groups of male adolescents, after having attended a long-term drug rehabilitation program, towards their future life challenges. Within the chosen concept of IOA® we place a focus on the cycle of intervention, which allows for a flexible use of all kinds of interventions and which highlights the importance of reflection and transfer. According to our working experiences the assumed role of the trainers and the trainers' behavior are crucial for personal development chances of participants during the training setting. The target group is especially sensitive to some topics like power, independence and motivation. Of course these themes are present in all possible training groups and settings, but according to our view in social therapy an extra notice is needed. The participants are particularly prone to regress for example, if the trainers do not pay enough attention to empowering them and to lead them in a responsible way into more independence and autonomy. Intrinsic motivation of the adolescents, perceived and actual degrees of freedom as well as an open and transparent conflict and communication culture among group members and with the trainers are indispensable. In this regard we suggest some structural elements, methods and intervention



techniques (not exhaustive) for future adoption. We are quite open that our reflections are primarily based on our professional intuition and that in the field of outdoor education and social therapy there is a great need of further research in order to prove or disapprove our findings.

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### The running A



#### Description

Three beams, two with a length of 3,5m and one with a length of 2,5m and a diameter of 12cm are tied with a rope in the form of an A. Three (six) ropes are fixed at the top of the A.



#### Goal of the activity:

Persons, who hold the rope at the end will make the A walking with the one person inside.

#### Safety

- ◆ The person inside the A puts on a helmet.
- ◆ Concentration of the persons who are on the ropes, they look to the person in the A.
- ◆ The trainer spots the person inside the A at the first steps.

#### Theme of the activity



- ◆ Problem solving,
- ◆ Cooperation in the group by supporting one person.



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# How the intermunicipal outdoor recreation boards in Norway stimulate to outdoor learning in primary schools

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## ABOUT FRILUFTSRÅDENES LANDSFORBUND (FL)

### The National Association of Intermunicipal Outdoor Recreation Boards

- Intermunicipal outdoor recreation board in Norwegian is *friluftsråd*
- 20 *friluftsråd* as members
- More than 170 municipalities as members in a *friluftsråd*
- More than 70% of the Norwegian population
- Supreme body: General Assembly and a Board with 5 members
- Main tasks:
  - support the work of the *friluftsråds* and advise them in their work
  - act as a liaison between the *friluftsråds* and state governments and other national organizations





## THE «FRILUFTSRÅDS»

**The *friluftsråds* serves the municipalities with a lot of tasks**

- Protect valuable areas of outdoor recreation
- Organize and facilitate outdoor areas
- Manage and operates outdoor areas
- Outdoor learning and activities
- Information and promotion of outdoor recreation







## The intermunicipal outdoor recreation board in the southern part of Norway: **Friluftsrådet Sør**

- 3 employees
- 9 municipalities
- 90 000 inhabitants
- 52 primary schools

### Main subjects

- Information and promotion of outdoor recreation
- Outdoor learning and outdoor activities for children
- Holiday activities for children and youth
- Measures to stimulate people to improve their own health and wellbeing during physical activity in nature
- Activities to teach immigrants about the Norwegian tradition related to outdoor activities and recreation
- Activities for people with special needs
- We provide advice to municipal councils in issues that concerns outdoor policies, laws and regulations

[www.friluftsrad.no](http://www.friluftsrad.no)



## OUTDOOR LEARNING

### Working together for more and better outdoor activities in kindergarten, primary school and after school program

- 1999: four *friluftsråds* wrote books for schools and kindergartens
- Evolved:
  - almost all the *friluftsråds* take part
  - several joint projects
  - 3000 teachers at courses
  - 21000 children and youth
- More: more time is spent outside the classroom
- Better: activities should be based on laws and regulations, such as the national curriculum





**Outdoor Learning  
provides realistic  
learning**

**Outdoor Learning  
contributes to more  
physical activity and  
better health**

**FOUR CORE VALUES**



**Outdoor Learning  
contributes to other  
social relations**

**Outdoor Learning  
provides nature  
experiences**



## Outdoor learning in Friluftsrådet Sør

**We arrange courses for teachers in schools and kindergartens, where we teach them how to use outdoor learning as a tool to educate young people**

[www.friluftsrad.no](http://www.friluftsrad.no)





**We are networking for employees in the education sector.  
We will tell you more about this in a few minutes.**





**We arrange activities for pupils where they get to work with different school topics using multiple senses during outdoor education**

[www.friluftsrad.no](http://www.friluftsrad.no)





## We arrange activities and base camps for young people during the school holidays

[www.friluftsrad.no](http://www.friluftsrad.no)



## We arrange courses where immigrants learn about traditional Norwegian outdoor activities

[www.friluftsrad.no](http://www.friluftsrad.no)





## We arrange activities for people with special needs





**We arrange activities for people who want to improve their health through outdoor activity**



[www.friluftsråd.no](http://www.friluftsråd.no)





**We have bikes and skates for rent  
and arrange activities where these are being used.**

[www.friluftsrad.no](http://www.friluftsrad.no)





## Equipment lending





## Information: Maps, folders, web-site, books, information-boards

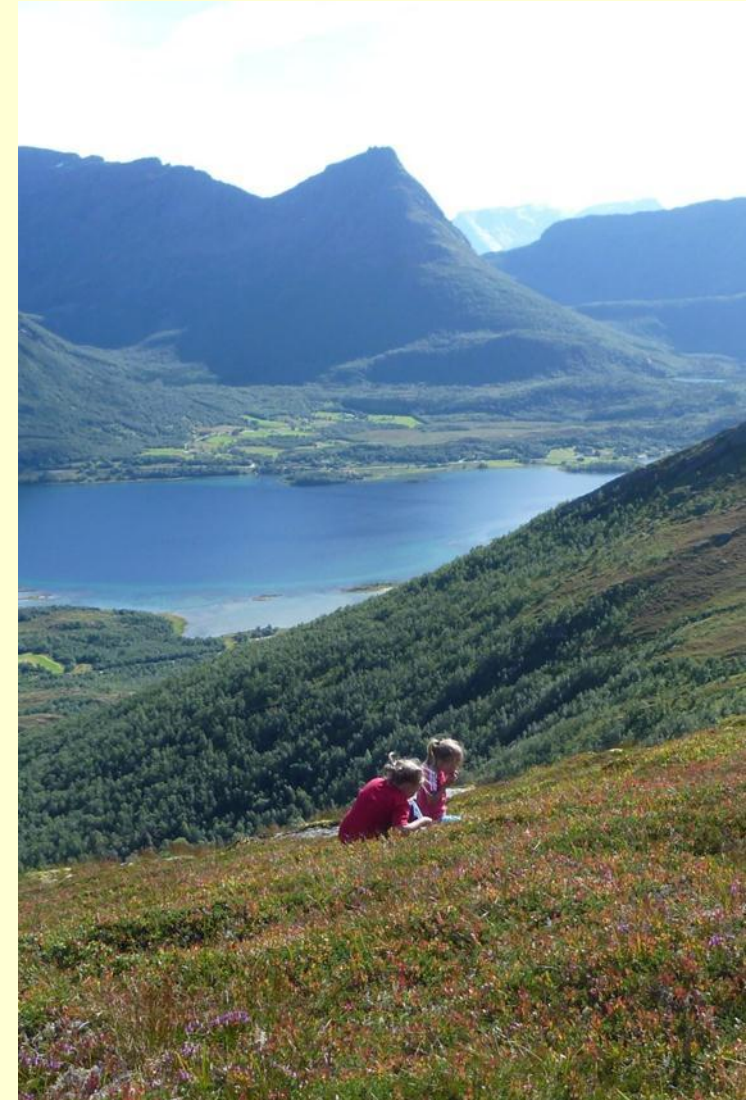
www.friluftsrad.no



## «TRENDS» IN NORWEGIAN SCHOOLS

### Happiness, democracy and PISA...?

- High degree of well-being among pupils
- Pupils have great knowledge and understanding of democracy
- The results of the PISA surveys are lower than expected compared to other countries
- New national curriculum (2006) and focus at the results of the PISA survey, have decreased the outdoor activity





## MAJOR CHALLENGES

### Individuallity, practical work but little learning, inactivity

- Outdoor activities often rely on individual teachers
- Activity, but little learning
- Schools want to reach the goal of 1 hour physical activity every day – good health policy – but they don't know how to organize





## GOAL

Help schools to locate and use “learn-locations” (or pedagogic place) at the institutional level that provide relevant and realistic learning

### Tool on the internet: Location-based Learning

- Internet tool for systematizing outdoor activities.

### “Learning networks” for more and better outdoor learning

- Working method to increase the school’s expertise and school committing to more outdoor learning



## *Outdoor learning in network*

### **A network for developing skills and knowledge through cooperation among schools and teachers.**

- Established by FL in 2007
- The purpose of networking is to help schools making more and better outdoor activities in their teaching
- The network will be learning in the sense that it creates dialogue, exchange of experiences and reflection as the basis for change and development of work practices
- FL published a guidance booklet that describes how to establish and operate a network a to help the intermunicipal outdoor recreation boards to lead schools who want to cooperate in networks





## **Guidelines for the outdoor learning networks**

### **Schools that choose to participate in these networks are required to follow some guidelines**

- The members of the network will get together 2–4 times each academic year
- 1 - 2 teachers represent each school in the network's meetings. After each meeting they present the work to colleagues and management at their own school
- The school is responsible for the economic expenses related to their participation in the network's meetings (travel-expenses and compensation to the teachers that represent their school)
- Each network selects its own topics and areas
- During the meetings participants communicate knowledge to another, they get professional input and they find common challenges and goals
- Participants must find a suitable way to communicate and keep in touch between the meetings
- Network work will continue for at least two years

## *Our Outdoor learning in network*

### **The intermunicipal outdoor recreation board Friluftsrådet Sør leads a outdoor learning network**

- Established in 2008
- 7 schools from 4 municipalities participate
- A network for building capacity and sharing knowledge among schools and teachers
- The schools are responsible for one meeting each
- All schools contribute with concrete activities, which often occur in practice during the sessions
- Meetings with focus on special topics (day-/evening programs) about once every school year (such as: the lobster's life, the coastal culture, geology, astronomy)





## Our experiences with *Outdoor learning in network*

**Conducted in 2011 a study of teachers and schools that participated in the network to find out if the network serves as a tool for learning and development**

- To visit other schools is a great way to get ideas, inspiration and to learn from others
- To visit potential learning environments gives professional competence that is significant for the development of knowledge
- The schooladministration's involvement is of great importance both for the participants and for whether the knowledge is passed on to their colleagues
- reference to curriculum is an important prerequisite for the method outdoor learning to be academically justified
- Outdoor learning gives more joy to both pupils and teachers and in addition it provides great health benefits for both children and adults



## LOCATION-BASED LEARNING

### Five steps for «Location-based» learning

1. Survey the school neighborhood, find good learning locations
2. Create teaching programs for the learning locations
3. Establish the school's database, so information about learning locations and teaching programs are available to all teachers at the school
4. Create plan for what all teachers HAVE TO DO with their pupils (and what they CAN DO as well)
5. Share good ideas with other schools

Watch the sort presentation:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nlMltf3crvE&feature=youtube\\_gdata](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nlMltf3crvE&feature=youtube_gdata)



## LOCATION-BASED LEARNING

### How to stimulate schools to use Location-based learning?

- Tool at the internet:  
[www.kartiskolen.no/stedsbasert](http://www.kartiskolen.no/stedsbasert)
- Educational programs for the teachers
- Textbooks:  
[www.friluftsrad.no/stedsbasert](http://www.friluftsrad.no/stedsbasert)
- ...and use Google to translate the websites: [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)





# THE AMAZING ADVENTURE OF THE 'GRANDEUR NATURE' MISSION

The hero of this story, the 15-metre catamaran, is an original multihull, differing from the usual criteria, almost unusual. It is the instrument of a unique nautical and educational project, and has around twenty Atlantic crossings on the clock since 1996! Multihull sailors of all kinds - teachers, pupils, sailors, travelling families about to depart or those who have already returned - embark with us to discover a nautical tribe with a strong personality which you will perhaps meet one day on the ocean.

*By Philippe Echelle - Photos: DR*

## CAPTAINS FOR 15

Mark Twain, Robert Louis Stevenson and Jules Verne produced an abundance of literature where young heroes are propelled into romantic adventures. They go to meet danger and their limits, discover themselves and build themselves up through these adventures. This mythology charmed generations of children who fed their dreams of escape from these collections, but the problems of social integration remain a litany and despite everyone's efforts, the educational and social failure machine is running flat out. By crossing the peripherals of the 21st century, Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn are flirting with new dangers, with more fatal conse-

quences than the eddies of their native Mississippi.

## EMBARKING TO GROW UP?

The 20th century was a fertile period for educational theories; should we see in this a form of catharsis, a symbolic attempt to ultra-violent historic period? Psychoanalysis, Carl Rogers' non directivity, Freinet's or Maria Montessori's pedagogy, Makarenkos' children's colonies, Summerhill's free children, all these brilliant intellectual constructions hardly seem to have influenced the way things have progressed! Perhaps we have subconsciously assimilated the essence of



Hoisting the mainsail: the older members are completely involved, the new members learn...



them? This is an optimistic supposition! After having terribly mistreated the novices who were more or less 'press-ganged' aboard military, cargo or fishing vessels over the centuries, it was natural that the maritime world also experienced experiments which were either promising... or dreadful, depending on the case! The winds of 1968 faded away; certain 'visionaries', finding themselves 'cramped' in a terribly institutional and Jacobin national

peutic route with LE BEL ESPOIR... 'Zone Bleue' and 'La Déferlante' continued their efforts, and chartered two big schooners for hospitalized children and teenagers in trouble with the law; they did some good work, but struggled with the interpretation of collective agreements unsuited to their profession. The Nicolas Hulot Foundation's FLEUR DE LAMPAUL had to interrupt its activity in 2009, for financial reasons. This list is of course non-exhaustive, yet it shows the scale of the difficulties, in a field where the initiatives are dwindling away! Does this mean that any attempt using a nautical support is doomed to failure, drift and lack of permanence? This would be a hasty conclusion for such an extraordinarily educational and value-giving environment.

#### 'GRANDEUR NATURE': A CULTURAL EXCEPTION?

Far from any theorizing, we wanted to show an alternative which works, led by normal adults who are enthusiastic, available, attentive and generous. Their vocation is to accompany teenagers towards a productive independence before anything can incite them to go off the rails. The 'field of fire'? A strategic area in the child's development, the teens, between 11 and 17, with an ideal age for intervention of around 14-15. Every year from 1996 onwards, I used to see their 15-metre catamaran hauled out on the hard at Sète or in the La Méridienne boatyard, having the minor damage from the annual migration patched up and being prepared for the next edition. I sometimes visited

#### A catamaran thought out for the expeditions

The Manta 50 originates from a previous personal idea dedicated to the same programme. The basic definition implied robustness and functional simplicity. Having got rid of all sophistication in the construction method, the multiple chine hulls with a progressive V-shape allow relatively easy manufacture which is suited to the requirements. Laminations, bonding and epoxy impregnation, solid wood and laminations in well-dried Carolina pine, multiply Meranti plywood (at the time we didn't know about the problems of deforestation in Indonesia!), hull skins in Kevlar, deck moulded under vacuum in ply/honeycomb, large crash boxes, pivoting centreboards, suspended, retractable rudders with crash boxes... All the accommodation elements participate in the mechanical structure, in continuity and geometrical overlap with the whole. The very flush deck splits up the manoeuvring positions, to allow real team work. The cutter rig with multiple hounds and no spreaders or furlers, original at the time, confirms this search for simplicity, but is only compatible with a stiff platform. The accommodation is split between the two hulls, one intended for domestic life and the other dedicated to navigation and personal work.

There are no headlinings, and it is easy to clean.

*Denis Kergomard*

them, discreetly, to breathe in the scent of adventure which floated around the multihull. Word of mouth was positive, but discretion was their main value. No bragging, pedantic speeches or definitive evaluation, no publicity, interviews or televised broadcasts: their label is 'vu nulle part' (seen nowhere)! Convinced that they are right, these sailor-educators don't hesitate to question themselves, and are modest about the scope of their intervention: just 6 youngsters each time, so they have to get under way quickly! In 2011, after 3 years of patient compilation and laying-out, they have published 2,000 examples of a superb collective work; it was time to get to know them.

#### A TIRELESS SAILING

When I saw it in 1994, I was looking for a suitable multihull for the 'Challenge FAIRE FACE' (round Europe and an Atlantic crossing under sail, by physically disabled people). At the La Méridienne boatyard, I crossed paths with Denis Kergomard and this Manta 50'. Gégé (its first name) had just been meticulously built by the architect and a few wood-

The Grandeur Nature association has been taking its teenagers around the Atlantic aboard this catamaran since...1995!

and specialised education system, disappeared into the mirages of prevention of delinquency and experiments with severance, on land or at sea. From 1969 onwards, the pioneering and very questionable 'boat school' opened the way; it made a few people happy, and many others, who were tangled up in the behavioural drift of the lost guru leaders, unhappy. 'La Baleine Blanche', created in 1993, bowed out in 2007 with a whiff of scandal! More virtuous attempts followed. Père Jaouen tried a thera-

« Paul (aged 16, 2010 voyage), "the boy who didn't say hello." After 2 years out of school, he arrived aboard almost mute. Today he's a chatterbox... »



*Véronique, the association's nurse, here in a free clinic during a stopover in Haiti...*



*The 'older members' welcome Simon, the new crew member, in the catamaran's saloon...*



*The Azores appear on the horizon after a nice passage, and the teenagers scrub the deck, so their boat will be the most beautiful in the harbour...*



*During the Atlantic crossing, the youngsters get the measure of the boat, and everyone does his or her share of the work.*

epoxy specialists. The founders had financial problems and with heavy hearts, were envisaging reselling the catamaran. I went aboard and immediately fell under its spell. An open, efficient and fluid silhouette, lifting rudders and pivoting centreboards associated with Kevlar underwater reinforcement, a huge cockpit and a brilliantly simple rig: all this spoke for itself. Visiting the interior opened my eyes to the extraordinary volumes and a totally different organisation of the areas. The intelligence, the ergonomics and the strength of this lightweight construction offer the promise of frugal and happy use. The test which followed revealed all its potential; the machine was fast, perfectly balanced, and its movements were gentle: I was won over! The images shot on that day allowed the future decision makers from the Association des Paralysés de France to appropriate the idea. Created auspiciously, both adventures were successful. FAIRE FACE was finally an Exception 52' trimaran (Briand-Pinta) and the Manta 50', which became GRANDEUR NATURE, continued its life in the hands of its legitimate owners.

## CAPTAIN DASNIÈRES' CHILDREN

Christophe Dasnières is the driving force behind Grandeur Nature. He derives his legitimacy from his own career as a child of on-board schooling, then co-founder of La Baleine Blanche, from which he was ousted. He believed in the relevance of his educational action, which was also a way of life, and committed himself fully. He bought the catamaran then put it at the association's disposal; this time he was the owner, so he could guarantee the permanence of the operation. After having shaken things down on a first transat in the winter of '95, Christophe welcomed 6 teenagers from the 'Foyer de l'Enfance de l'Essonne' for the return Atlantic crossing. His partner Véronique, a qualified nurse, looked after the health aspect. Christophe has taken part in 14 of the 15 expeditions! Each rotation was the opportunity to test other adjustments to the crew, and look for more subtle balances. The founding couple delegated, trained, trusted, and surrounded themselves with skills which sometimes came from the universities or specialised sectors, but were always passionate and generous with their efforts, despite the inconceivable availability required! The man has a discreet charisma and refuses to

put himself forward; the force of his simple, fair, candid speech is obvious. He is at home when voyaging, and practices his profession of ocean guide with pride and pleasure. Surrounded by his team, this nautical Sherpa remains humble, but sticks firmly to his fundamental aims. At a distance from educational psychology jargon, Christophe is familiar with the force of the marine environment, and its impact on minds and bodies. Patient, almost crafty, he sets up the environment and waits for the magic potion to take effect. For the open sea, the spontaneity of the human contacts and the meticulously-planned cultural immersions strip away the old veneers, the postures, the false self. Vigilant,

*The 'open space' deck: many advantages, a few disadvantages...*





demanding, he knows how to get adults and youngsters to collaborate to mark out a new route and allows everyone to bring out their authentic talents, have a personal word, get round gales and the blues to confront what follows as free men and women, as Captains Courageous of the lives they are constructing. He's quite a bloke!

## A YEAR'S HOLIDAY?

The epic of these fifteen years is so dense that only those who have experienced it can talk about it; they have done just that in a book! I wanted to meet them so I could understand better. The pretext was perfect for four former members of the 2005, 2007 and 2011 expeditions to return to the boat they loved so much and to take advantage of the opportunity to look back. We spent 2 days together; I was immediately struck by their adaptation to the environment of course, their enthusiasm, their ease when manoeuvring, also by their way of communicating; real professionals! There was no attitude in their exchanges, just simple, rich expression, full of nuances, common sense, mutual respect, a lucid view of themselves and the world, with a head full of projects.

Xan (aged 21, 2005 voyage), is in the third year of the merchant navy school in Marseille. He has known the association since the start. "The best age to go is 14 – 15;" he is now on the board of directors.

Aurel (aged 20, 2007 voyage), his parents are organic market gardeners, he is in the 2nd year of the same school, he also accompanied the return trip from the Azores in 2010 as first mate. "My motivation was to travel for 9 months, but I brought my maths and physics books so I could join a French 'lère S'; my sister did the trip with us too." Aurel is also on the board of directors.

he arrived aboard almost mute. Today he's a chatterbox with something to say, a speaker overflowing with activity, a good companion, with a sparkling intelligence. On returning, he found a French 'seconde' programme, prepared a 'Bac pro' in marine maintenance at the Institut Nautique de Bretagne and has just finished a 6-month course at Incidences, the sailmaker. "I am the typical case for Grandeur Nature; when you come back, you are an adult, with a mysterious kind of added value."

Ismaël (aged 18, 2010 voyage), a first name predestined to embark! Like Melville's hero (Moby Dick), he omits himself, whilst keeping a controlled distance with respect to adventures which are still fresh in his mind. "The voyage? For me, it meant acquiring logic, and now being more self-confident."

I also met Simon (aged 13) and his parents, Hélène and Frédéric. Simon will be on the 2011 expedition. The 40 knots blowing the day of our test, at the beginning of April, didn't impress him, but he confessed that he was worried for his sleep. "I hope there won't be as much noise permanently." The older members of the crew explained and reassured him; he was accepted.

In October 2012, GRANDEUR NATURE will be leaving Sète, for Gibraltar, Senegal, the Cape Verde islands, Brazil, Guiana, Dominica, St. Domingo/Haiti and the Banc d'Argent, where meeting the whales is always the high point of each trip, and celebrates a form of communion-reward with nature, before heading east again.

Alas the budgets have dropped by 30%, and the financial balance is compromised. It would be an incalculable waste if the operation should be called into question in the future; it must continue, the transmission is obligatory!



## Voyage to the centre of the self: aims and means

### ✓ To restore or develop self-esteem

Healthy living (no tobacco or alcohol), personal expression, fight against language stereotypes. Win the group's confidence by responsibility (helm, cooking, maintenance), setting up a pedagogy of success.

### ✓ To become a player, to engage reflection

Adherence to the project, respect of weekly contracts. The strict rules are tools which allow harmonious links with the environment. Protection of the environment, discovery of cultures, interventions by scientists or humanitarian aid workers feed the development of a world view and socio-environmental relationships.

✓ To open up to the world and to learn Experience the cruise, learn the languages, to communicate... Group pedagogy drives acquisitions, but the adventure begins with doing your washing, sweeping up and cooking!

### ✓ Create desires

For the boat to work well, skills have to be acquired. Discoveries of crafts, fishing, aquaculture, improving the image of manual work feed the future professional projects.

### ✓ A motivated management team

A referent psychologist before, during and after; the possibility of contacting him/her via the internet at stopovers. Alternation of crew and skippers every three months, but an official for the whole of the expedition.

### ✓ A multi-support expression

Personal journal, collective logbook, reports (health, sport, education, society), graphic arts, collective letter every 15 days, theatre, singing, music.

### ✓ Important encounters

Casamance, Cape Verde, Brazil, Sœur Flora orphanage in Haiti, Dominica, the whales on the Banc d'Argent...

*The GRANDEUR NATURE association's web site:*

[www.grandeurnature.org](http://www.grandeurnature.org)





**Red Barnet**

Save the Children Denmark

## **JOYFULL OUTDOOR TOGETHER**

**– A NORDIC CO-OPERATION AND PARTNERSHIP PROJECT**



### **CONCEPT NOTE – SAVE THE CHILDREN DENMARK**

**October 2012**

Red Barnet - Rosenørns Allé 12, 1634 København V, Danmark - Telefon 35 36 55 55 - Fax 35 39 11 19 - [www.redbarnet.dk](http://www.redbarnet.dk) - [redbarnet@redbarnet.dk](mailto:redbarnet@redbarnet.dk)

**Red Barnet er en del af Save the Children - verdens største uafhængige  
børnerettighedsorganisation.**

**Red Barnet kæmper for børns rettigheder og giver akut og langsigtet hjælp til udsatte børn i Danmark og resten af  
verden.**

## Introduction and background

The effect of being in the outdoors and having nature experiences is known to improve people's wellbeing, health, physical conditions, learning capabilities and creativity. Even the building of positive relationships and improved social interaction can be effects if children and adult spend more time in the outdoors. Research in these issues confirm this and new knowledge is added every year to support this<sup>1</sup>.

Since 2006 Save the Children Denmark (Red Barnet) has implemented a project "In Nature Together" (Natur&Fællesskab) that develop and implement nature and outdoor based social activities for socially disadvantaged families and children living in Denmark.

Over the years the project has gathered extensive experience in using the outdoors and nature for various types of activities with different target groups. As examples can be mentioned:

- Outdoor schools and learning with asylum seeking refugee children living in refugee camps in Denmark. Activities were planned in co-operation with teachers and other staff from the schools of the children.
- Social training and anti-bullying programs with school classes with bad social patterns and bullying problems.
- Outdoor school program with children and staff from a municipality school for children with various behavioral disorders (ADHD etc.).
- Social recreational family activities for refugee families living in Danish refugee camps in co-operation with volunteers from Save the Children and Danish Red Cross.
- Social recreational family activities for war traumatized refugee families with residency permit in Denmark in co-operation with therapists from a regional psychiatric treatment centre.
- Social recreational family activities for socially disadvantaged families from socially troubled housing areas in Denmark in co-operation with the housing companies, municipalities and volunteers.

From 2009 the main "staff resource" in the project has been the growing number of volunteers in the various local Save the Children divisions all over Denmark. The last few years local volunteers has formed more than 30 "Family Clubs" where some 40-50 family members from socially disadvantaged families participate in 8-10 social activities per year.

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of references:

Kahn and Kellert (eds) (2002): Children and Nature. Psychological, Sociocultural and Evolutionary Investigations. MIT Press, Massachusetts. Pp 348.

Louv (2006): Last child in the Woods. Saving our children from nature-deficit disorder. Algonquin Books, North Carolina. Pp 334.

Web sites: udeskole.dk (Danish), [www.childrenandnature.org](http://www.childrenandnature.org) (English),

By the end of 2013 it is estimated that ca. 50 such “Family Clubs” will be running all over Denmark, all based on volunteers from Save the Children Denmark.

The Save the Children project “In Nature Together” focus on developing and implementing nature based activities for the target group such as:

- Campfire food events in the forest
- Nature-handicraft and wood carpentering activities using wood, leather etc.
- Plays and simple social games and various tasks using the nature as the frame.
- Tree logging and other physical wood activities using axes, knives, etc under safe conditions.
- Nature walks and observations of plants and animals to increase knowledge and empathy.
- Outdoor camping to build social relations and participants co-operation skills.
- Canoeing trips and kayaking under safe conditions to provide special moments.
- And many more different things!

All activities are developed to be safe, secure and are based on the idea that all participants should be able to take part, must feel comfort and it should be a memorable day. Thus, the activities do not intend to “break limits” or “cross personal borders” of the children and adults.

The lesson learned from all these projects show that nature and the outdoors is a very useful room for improving and strengthening social relations within families, improving network between participating families, stimulating participants to physical activities, building friendships among children and parents, increasing inclusion in society, providing more knowledge about the environment, etc.

Since 2006 a multitude of partners and donors has co-operated with us and supported the project. Some examples are:

- The Danish Outdoor Council (Friluftsrådet)
- Danish Red Cross
- Centre for Forestry and Landscape, University of Copenhagen
- Lejerbo (A national housing company)
- The Danish Scout Union (Det Danske Spejderkorps)
- The rehabilitation centre for survivors of torture and trauma, Region South Denmark
- The National Nature Agency, Ministry of Environment
- Ministry of Social Affairs

Save the Children Denmark has allocated 1-2 full time staff to the project activities. Currently the staff is: Thor Hjarsen, project manager (biologist and nature interpreter), Anne Walsø, project assistant (sociologist), and Rasmus Dylov, student assistant (certified outdoor instructor). The project is also supported by Save the Children Denmark’s 3 national volunteer consultant staff.

## **Project idea for a Nordic co-operation project**

Save the Children Denmark and Finland seek Nordic partners (Sweden, Norway and Iceland) that will be interested in developing a trans-Nordic project building on the Danish experiences but also on own experiences. Save the Children Finland is also currently developing a similar project together with the Finnish forest agency.

All Nordic countries have long and well established outdoor cultures but many socially disadvantaged families don't take part in this due to social and/or economic constraints. Furthermore, immigrant families often have nature and outdoor experiences from the countries of origin that is a great resource in such project activities.

The idea is to develop a 2-3 year project that could contain the following components:

### ***Develop national and Nordic partnerships with relevant partners in the different participating countries<sup>2</sup>***

Three types of partners can be identified: 1) Partners with funding or other relevant resource input such as facilities, logistics, materials. 2) Partners with access to the target groups such as social and health workers, refugee camp staff, etc. 3) Partners with nature and outdoor resources such as nature interpreters, rangers, outdoor instructors etc.

### ***Exchange experience among the project staff and project volunteers from all participating countries.***

Repeated Nordic and national workshops during the project were staff and volunteers meet and exchange experiences. External experts might be included. Children and adults from the target group might be included.

### ***Train volunteers and secure experience exchange among volunteers.***

National and Nordic courses and study visits for staff and volunteers. Courses and study visit might include external knowledge resources such as universities etc.

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<sup>2</sup> Save the Children Denmark have already established some contacts to nature and outdoor resources in Iceland, Norway and Sweden. Additional partners might be relevant in this field but also other partners should be engaged.

***Implement actual outdoor and nature activities in the different countries for socially disadvantaged families***

A significant number of outdoor and nature activities for the target groups is implemented in each country. Registration and documentation.

***Documentation and evaluate the activities and the effect on the target groups***

An external evaluation and documentation component might be included. Also a final report must be made available.

***Develop manuals for social activities using the outdoors and nature***

Various guidelines and simple manual is produced to support volunteers in planning and implementing activities.

***Project management and steering committee***

To be agreed upon.

**Project development plan 2013**

Save the Children Denmark (Thor Hjarsen) and Save the Children Finland (Riita Kaupinnen) invites Save the Children partners from Norway, Sweden and Iceland to a 2-day project development seminar in Helsinki in January/February 2013.

Funding of such seminar needs to be secured. A request will be submitted to the Nordic Council.

A project proposal and tentative budget will be presented to potential donors around April 2013. Potential main donor is the Nordic Council. Around June 2013 a final project application will be submitted to donors.

Save the Children Denmark will be main responsible for project development.

**For more information and contact**

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